

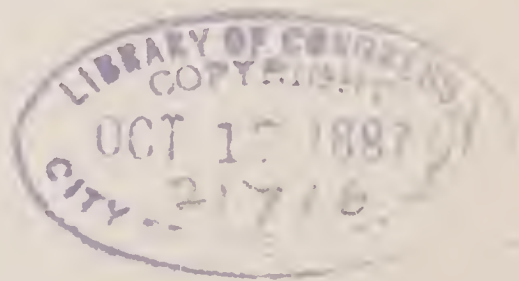
OUT OF THE SHADOW

BY

MARY HUBBARD HOWELL

AUTHOR OF THROUGH THE WINTER, ON THE WAY HOME, IN AFTER
YEARS, AND ALONG THE OLD ROAD.

He satisfieth the longing soul.—*Bible.*



PHILADELPHIA:
THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
1122 CHESTNUT STREET.
NEW YORK: 10 BIBLE HOUSE.

P23
H5395 Qu

Copyright, 1887, by
THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION.

IF of this story I cannot say truthfully that—in every particular—"I tell the tale as it was told to me," I can at least say that facts, as strange as fiction, have furnished me with a strong foundation; and so many of the incidents actually occurred, that imagination has done little more than piece together "bits of truth."

MARY HUBBARD HOWELL.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
SURPRISED	9

CHAPTER II.

CONQUERED	26
---------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

OPINIONS	42
--------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

DISCORDS	53
--------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

REVELATIONS	76
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

RESOLUTIONS	96
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER VII.

PLANS	112
-----------------	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

SCHOOL-DAYS	136
-----------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX.

SOLITUDE	162
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

STRANGERS	PAGE 177
---------------------	----------

CHAPTER XI.

SUGGESTIONS 195

CHAPTER XII.

QUESTIONS 216

CHAPTER XIII.

SERMONS 233

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFIDENCES 251

CHAPTER XV.

CONVERSATIONS 267

CHAPTER XVI.

PUZZLES 286

CHAPTER XVII.

DISCOVERIES 304

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT LAST 324

OUT OF THE SHADOW.

CHAPTER I.

SURPRISED.

“One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving why they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far, perhaps, they rue it.”
—*Robert Burns.*

IT was early summer, and the day was one of those perfect ones for which June has been so often and so fondly praised.

There were few clouds in the warm blue sky, few shadows resting on the low hills that shut in the little village of Hermitsville, and no sound, louder than the contented cluck of a mother-hen, to disturb the silence and peace of the old farmhouse, that had been for nearly two centuries the birthplace and home of the Millington family.

The present Millingtons of Hermitsville—though by no means rich—were, and had good cause to be, proud of their place and station among

the world's workers. No stain nor shadow of suspicion ever had rested on their name; through many long generations it had been borne by upright, pure-minded men and women, who had cultivated with contented hearts the broad, rich fields they called their own; and, keeping the even tenor of their way, had sought faithfully to do their duty in the station in which it had pleased God to place them.

In their characters, as well as in their customs, the present Millingtons were almost exact copies of their ancestors. Remote from the world, they knew little of its craft and sin save from hearsay, and conscious of their own integrity they seldom thought of suspecting the integrity of others. Toiling, rejoicing or sorrowing, as for them God's will might be, they lived their lives; and nothing out of the ordinary course had ever happened to them until this June afternoon, that, as she laid aside her gingham working-apron and sat down in her open door to rest, Mrs. Millington thought one of the brightest afternoons she had ever known. She was alone. Her five healthy children were at school, and her husband was busy in an adjoining field. There was nothing to disturb her, and with a long-drawn breath of mingled weariness and content she folded her tired hands, leaned back in her cushioned rocker, and, overcome by the silence and the warm, drowsy air, soon fell asleep.

She was awakened suddenly by the click of the gate, and, starting up, she passed her hands over her smooth hair to convince herself it was in order, and then looked out with some curiosity to see who was coming.

It was a stranger, a woman, carrying a young child. And in the kindness of her heart Mrs. Millington left her chair and advanced a few steps to meet her.

Slowly the stranger came up the graveled path, and as she watched her Mrs. Millington saw that she was very neatly dressed, and that her face was young and pretty, though its expression was peculiar.

“Just as if she had something to do that she was afraid to do, and yet was determined she would do,” Mrs. Millington said that night, when she tried to recall the woman’s appearance and describe her to her husband. When she first saw her, however, Mrs. Millington did not think much about the stranger’s expression. She noticed, with her usual quick sympathy, that she seemed very tired, and with a pleasant smile she waited to welcome her.

The woman seemed a little embarrassed as she met Mrs. Millington’s kind gaze, but her voice was low and pleasing as she said :

“It is a warm day, ma’am, and I am very tired; may I rest here awhile?”

"Yes, certainly," Mrs. Millington answered, with warm hospitality. "Come in and sit down. Tired, are you? I should think you would be if you have carried that heavy baby long. Have you walked far?"

"I don't know the exact distance," the stranger said, as she dropped wearily into the comfortable chair Mrs. Millington drew forward for her; "perhaps the heat made the way seem longer than it really was. I am boarding in Millbrook and I have walked from there."

"From Millbrook!" Mrs. Millington exclaimed in surprise. "What could have induced you to do such a thing? Millbrook is nearly three miles from here."

"Is it?" the woman asked indifferently. "Well, I should think it might be. If I measured the distance by my feelings I should say I had walked around the globe. But I wanted to give baby an airing," she hastened to explain. "He hasn't seemed very well lately, but the long walk has done him good, I think, for he is asleep now." And as she spoke the stranger drew aside the light veil that covered the dimpled and rosy face of the little sleeper.

"Asleep!" Mrs. Millington echoed, as she came near and looked down with motherly eyes on the tiny, unconscious creature; "why, so he is, and you are so tired you must lay him down

somewhere. Here," she continued—as she opened a door and dragged a large, old-fashioned willow cradle into the room—"you may put him in this."

"Have you a baby, ma'am?" the woman asked, as she watched Mrs. Millington beat up the downy pillows and straighten the snowy sheet.

"No," Mrs. Millington answered, with a smile that ended in a sigh. "But I have a tender feeling for this old cradle," she explained in a moment. "I watched my last baby go to heaven from it; and since then it has seemed too sacred for me to banish it to the garret; and, besides," she added in a lighter tone, "I often find it very useful when my neighbors come in to sit with me for an hour or two and bring their little ones. There, it's ready now; let me take the baby."

"I am making you a great deal of trouble, ma'am," the woman said, as Mrs. Millington gently took the sleeping child from her.

"Trouble! don't speak of it. I love to make children comfortable. Dear little thing; how soundly he sleeps. There," and Mrs. Millington laid the little one down tenderly and gave the cradle a gentle jog with her foot; "he is as comfortable as a prince now; let him sleep there until you are ready to go."

"Thank you," the stranger said. A silence of several minutes followed, during which she furtively examined the room and closely studied Mrs.

Millington's placid face, as with downcast, unsuspecting eyes she stood beside the cradle slowly rocking it, and then she said :

"You seem very fond of children, ma'am."

"Do I?" Mrs. Millington said, with a cheery laugh. "Well, I believe there is no deception in the seeming. I always love to feel a baby's weight in my arms; if the little ones bring care with them, they just as truly bring comfort that sweetens the care. At least that has been my experience. How old is your baby?"

"He was born on last Christmas day," the woman answered, while she looked sharply at Mrs. Millington.

"Was he? It will be very easy to remember his birthday," Mrs. Millington said pleasantly.

"How many children have you, ma'am?" the woman asked soon, in an eager voice.

"Six in all," was the quiet answer. "Five on earth and one in heaven."

"Then you have lost one?" The question was asked in a troubled, almost pathetic voice, as if that thought touched a chord that still trembled painfully in the woman's heart.

"I never call it lost," Mrs. Millington said with a tender smile, though her eyes moistened. "It has only gone from me for a little while, and heaven has grown very near and real to me since my last baby went there."

A peculiar expression flitted across the woman's face and a strange light gleamed and glittered in her eyes. Mrs. Millington did not notice it, and whatever its cause it lasted but a moment, and then, in a cool, calculating voice, the stranger asked :

“Don't you feel, sometimes, that it is a great tax to provide for and take care of so many children?”

“No, no,” Mrs. Millington said earnestly, as if the cold question pained her warm, motherly heart. “I never have felt that my children were a burden; when love taxes us, you know, we always pay willingly. I believe,” she added, with a happy laugh, “that in my heart and home I could always find room for one more. What is your baby's name?” she asked now, with the secret wish to learn who her strange visitor was.

The woman's lips parted, and then—as if some sudden recollection warned her to be silent—closed firmly. “He isn't named yet,” she said slowly, after a moment's hesitation.

“Then let me advise you to give him your family name for his Christian one,” Mrs. Millington said, with a woman's interest. “I like that way of naming the oldest son.”

There was no reply to this gratuitous advice. Whatever the woman intended to do she plainly did not intend to name her baby in Mrs. Milling-

ton's hearing; and, fearing that she could not question her further without rudeness, Mrs. Millington quietly waited.

Ten or fifteen minutes passed. The baby's soft, low breathing told how peacefully it was sleeping, and the woman, as she leaned back in her chair, looked very weary and exhausted.

Mrs. Millington watched her pale face with compassionate eyes for a few moments and then left the room. In a very short time, however, she returned with a glass of creamy milk and a plate of fresh, crisp ginger-snaps.

"What, is the baby awake?" she asked, as she saw that her visitor had left her seat and was going to the cradle.

The woman started and went hurriedly back to her chair. "I thought he was, but he isn't," she said, in some confusion.

"Don't disturb him until he does awake," Mrs. Millington said kindly. "I am sure you must be hungry after your long walk," she continued, as she offered her visitor the glass and plate, "and before you go I want you to take this little lunch. Don't hurry; you are welcome to sit here until you are thoroughly rested, but I must ask you to excuse me for awhile. The children are always so hungry when they come from school that we have supper early, and I must go and prepare it." And with her mind full of the strawberry short-

cake with which she intended to surprise her family, Mrs. Millington gently closed the parlor door and hastened to her kitchen.

The strawberries had been hulled, the tea-table spread, and the short-cake was browning beautifully in the oven, before Mrs. Millington was at leisure to look after her visitor; and then, just as she thought she would step into the parlor and see if she was still there, she chanced to glance out of a window and saw her walking slowly along the highway in the direction of Millbrook.

“Poor thing,” Mrs. Millington thought compassionately, “how tired she will be before she reaches her boarding-house with that heavy baby! I wonder who she is. Well, whoever she may be, I am glad I did what I could for her. It doesn’t cost much to show kindness to strangers, and, some-way, it does add wonderfully to our own comfort to know that we have done what we could to make some one else comfortable.” Then, with this pleasant reflection, Mrs. Millington took her short-cake from the oven, and in the agreeable excitement of spreading it with the delicious berries, and whipping her rich Alderney cream, she soon forgot all about the mysterious stranger. Supper was nearly over. The children’s noisy exclamations of delight over the short-cake had well repaid their tired mother for all her labor, and she was leaning back in her chair and watching her happy family

with a smile on her contented face, when suddenly, loud, shrill and imperious, above all the hubbub of laughing voices, and the clatter of glass and china, there came the sound of a baby crying.

“Hush! hark!” Mr. Millington exclaimed, in surprise. “Wife, what baby is that?”

“What baby?” Mrs. Millington’s eyes were opened to their widest extent; her hands were raised and her voice sharp and hysterical, as she cried: “Why, it can’t be—it must be—it is—”

“It can’t be, it must be, it is—what?” Mr. Millington demanded peremptorily, as another volley of loud and impatient cries came from the parlor. “Wife, for pity’s sake let us find out what it is, or it will waken the seven sleepers.”

“O, it’s that woman’s baby!” Mrs. Millington cried frantically, as, followed by her husband and children, she rushed into the parlor.

Everything there was in its usual neat and precise order; the cradle stood where she had placed it, and in the cradle, in the full glow of the sunshine that streamed in at a west window, lay the baby she had so innocently befriended a few hours before.

“It was crying vigorously; its little bare feet were kicking, with all its baby strength, against the side of the cradle, and, as in blank amazement Mrs. Millington looked down upon it, it raised its tiny arms as if begging for pity and protection.

“O, it is—it is that woman’s baby!” poor Mrs. Millington repeated, with a groan.

“What woman?” Mr. Millington asked, with sternness.

“O, I don’t know—I don’t know,” Mrs. Millington answered, in a despairing voice. “O, what shall I do?—what shall I do?”

“Take it up and stop its crying—if that is possible,” Mr. Millington advised, as the cries that had ceased for a moment began again and grew, with every breath, louder and more imperious.

Her husband’s stern and matter-of-fact words recalled Mrs. Millington to the immediate necessities of the situation; and stooping down she gently lifted the little one and carried it to a seat by the window.

With an odd little sob, expressive at once of past trouble and present satisfaction, the baby nestled contentedly in her arms, and looked with innocent dark eyes at the group of wondering children who had gathered about it.

“Bring some milk, Anna,” Mrs. Millington said to her eldest daughter, a girl of fourteen.

The milk was brought, and, after a few symptoms of disapproval, the baby condescended to take it, and after doing so sat quietly in Mrs. Millington’s lap, the least concerned and the most untroubled member of the household.

“And now, Sarah,” Mr. Millington said, as soon

as he could hope to be heard, "now, Sarah, tell me what this means. Where has this child come from, and whose is it?"

In as few words as possible Mrs. Millington told her story.

"You see, father," she said, in conclusion, "I really know no more about it than my opposite on the other side of the globe. Who would have supposed that that tired, harmless-looking woman could be wicked enough to desert her own baby. I never dreamed of such a thing."

Mr. Millington looked unutterable things during his wife's explanation.

"Well," he said dryly, when she had finished, "that is a pretty story, Sarah, but I believe I'd rather read it in a book than have it happen in my own family. I suppose I might as reasonably hope to see this baby take wings and fly away as hope to find that woman. But," he concluded, with emphasis, "if she is in Hermitsville or Millbrook I will find her before I sleep."

"There goes the doctor, and the minister is with him," exclaimed at that instant one of the children, who was standing by the window.

"Call them in; do call them in," Mrs. Millington pleaded, with a secret feeling that the more there were to share her trouble the sooner she would be relieved of it.

"Doctor, doctor," shouted Mr. Millington

through the open window ; and in the still evening air the call was heard distinctly by Dr. Wright.

Coolly remarking to his companion, "I suppose one of the little Millingtons has succeeded at last in breaking its arm or its neck," the doctor turned his horse, and in a very few minutes both the minister and himself were in the house. .

Mr. Millington met them at the door, and, without speaking, grasped the doctor with one hand and the minister with the other, and led them to the window where Mrs. Millington still sat with the baby. "Look there!" he ordered.

"Well," Dr. Wright replied, with much indifference, "I am looking, and I see a very fine, healthy baby ; but bless you, man, I am too old to go into ecstasies over such an everyday sight."

"Ecstasies !" Mr. Millington repeated, with intense scorn ; but before he could say more the minister, whose thoughtful eyes had detected at once that something was wrong, kindly asked :

"What is the matter, Mr. Millington? Are you in trouble? Has anything unusual occurred?"

"Anything unusual !" Mr. Millington echoed, in an excited voice ; "well, perhaps, you will not think it anything unusual, Mr. Crosby. The wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove have been matched this afternoon, and"—he added bitterly—"with the usual result."

"O, don't talk so," Mrs. Millington begged tearfully. "Let me tell the story." And once more she related the events of the afternoon.

Dr. Wright listened with cool, critical attention.

"A clear case, I take it, of premeditated child-desertion," he said, when all was told. "Well, the woman is to be commended for one thing, she took care to leave her baby in comfortable quarters. Slept soundly, did it? Let me look at the youngster." And taking the little one from Mrs. Millington the doctor gave it a careful examination.

"Just as I suspected," he said, as he gave it back to the hands that, kinder than a mother's, were extended for it; "in my opinion that child has been for hours under the influence of some powerful opiate. No wonder it slept. Well, what are you going to do about it?" and he looked at Mr. Millington.

"Find that woman before I sleep," was the firm answer.

Dr. Wright nodded. "I wish you success," he said, "but you might just as well, in my opinion, look for the lost island of Atlantis, of which Mr. Crosby and I were talking when you called us. That woman—whatever her relation to this child—has laid her plans carefully. Her very questions to Mrs. Millington prove that. She satisfied herself that this would be a good home for the child before she left it, and, now that she has

left it, she will never call for it, and you will never find her."

"Then, what can we do with this child?" Mr. Millington demanded.

"Hum," Dr. Wright replied, "you must answer your own question, my friend; it is too serious a one for me to determine."

"We cannot keep it here," Mr. Millington declared; "we cannot afford to keep it."

"Wait," and Mr. Crosby laid his hand gently on the arm of the excited man. "Do not make any decision about this little one to-night, Mr. Millington. Take time to learn your duty before you either accept or reject this friendless child."

Mr. Millington looked sharply at his adviser a moment, and then he said, in a slow and almost bitter voice:

"You are a minister, Mr. Crosby; you have theories and explanations for a great many inscrutable and hidden things. Now, why do you suppose a good God allows such cruel deeds as this in a world where he has supreme power? Why does he suffer such innocent souls as this"—and he pointed to the unconscious baby, who was crowing with delight as one of the children played with it—"to be deserted by unnatural parents and left to the cold charity of a selfish world? Such things happen every day, Mr. Crosby; now, why does God permit them? Tell me, if you can."

“I cannot,” was the calm answer. “Hidden things I never attempt to explain, Mr. Millington; they belong to God. But ‘’tis life speaks plain,’ and twenty years from now—so far as this child is concerned—you will be able, perhaps, to answer your own questions. Meanwhile,” and a smile brightened the minister’s grave face, “I do not believe it is in cruelty to this little one that to-night it will have Mrs. Millington’s tender care, and neither do I believe that your providing for it—if you do provide for it—will ever make you poorer.”

“You might as sensibly talk of my endowing an orphan asylum, as of my providing for this child,” Mr. Millington said, in a voice sharp with anger. “Charity—with a poor man who has five children and only two hands—must of necessity begin and end at home.”

“Perhaps, then, it is fortunate for this little one that it is already in your home,” the minister said, with a smile.

A dark frown was Mr. Millington’s only reply to this gentle thrust, and, after watching the baby for a minute, the minister, who had no children, said slowly:

“I should be glad, if it were possible for me, to have this child in my own home.”

Mrs. Millington looked up anxiously. Mrs. Crosby, the minister’s wife, was dearly loved in

Hermitsville, and the little village owed much to her pure example and self-denying labors of love; but she bore with patient, uncomplaining grace the heavy cross of almost constant suffering, and Mrs. Millington knew it.

“O, no, Mr. Crosby,” she said, in quick response to his suggestion, “that is not to be thought of.”

“I am afraid it is not,” Mr. Crosby answered, with a half sigh. “Mr. Millington,” and his grave eyes moved from the baby’s little, untroubled face to the man’s cloudy and annoyed countenance, “if you are going to Millbrook to-night I will accompany you, and we will make every effort to find that woman, or, if we fail in doing that, to find at least some clue to her name and family. If she is heartless enough to desert her child, there may be others upon whom it has a claim who would gladly protect it. And in the meantime,” and he laid his hand gently upon the innocent baby-head, “we will remember that, like ourselves, this little one belongs to our Father in heaven; and for the love we bear that Father we will deal tenderly with his helpless child.”

“Ye—es,” Mr. Millington said, with secret reluctance. And as he left the room, accompanied by the doctor and Mr. Crosby, he whispered to himself the consoling promise: “Only for this one night.”

CHAPTER II.

CONQUERED.

“And the inward voice was saying :
Whatsoever thing thou doest
To the least of mine and lowest,
That thou doest unto me !”—*Longfellow.*

MR. MILLINGTON'S search for the unknown woman, as Dr. Wright had predicted, proved fruitless. Not a trace of her could be found.

All the boarding-houses, stores, and even the private homes in Millbrook, were visited, and everywhere the same answer was received. No one had seen or heard of such a person. Baffled and almost discouraged, Mr. Millington and Mr. Crosby went at last to the railroad station, and there the answers to their inquiries, though decisive, were far from satisfactory.

The depot-master did not remember seeing a woman with a baby leave the train that day, but he did remember distinctly that a woman, who answered in every particular to Mr. Millington's description, had taken the train for the city about four o'clock that afternoon. He remembered her

because the expression of her face had impressed him as being very peculiar; so peculiar, indeed, that he had watched her closely until the train bore her away.

“You may rest assured that the woman is a tramp.” Dr. Wright, who had just joined his friends at the station, said this. “She probably entered Hermitsville at your end of the village, Mr. Millington, and after leaving her child at your house came immediately to the station. By this time she is safe in New York; and you might as well try to find your way through the catacombs without a clue, as to trace her in that city without the aid of a detective—or even with one,” he added, to himself.

It was hard for Mr. Millington to acknowledge himself defeated, and it was late in the night when he finally abandoned the search and returned home. He was tired, disappointed, and angry: in no mood to be mollified by gentle words, and more determined than ever that the innocent cause of his trouble should not remain, for many hours, an inmate of his home.

“It is a fortunate thing that there are plenty of foundling asylums and almshouses in the country,” he said savagely to himself, as he entered his house. “It is a man’s duty to provide well for his own family; but it never has been, and it never will be, his duty to take in every little waif that drifts to

his door. Now, Sarah is so soft-hearted that I have no doubt she would be willing to keep this youngster, and wear herself out in working for and taking care of it. But I will have no sentiment about the business. The logic of good, sound, common-sense is what is needed in a case like this, and it is what I am going to use," and with this stern resolve Mr. Millington opened his room door, and with a set face and defiant air walked in.

The lamp was burning, but Mrs. Millington was asleep; and as her husband glanced at her he noticed that her face looked sad and tear-stained, and his own stern expression softened instantly.

"Poor Sarah," he thought, with kind appreciation of Mrs. Millington's unavailing self-reproaches; "after all, this trouble falls more heavily on her than on me." And anxious not to disturb her he moved with noiseless steps about the room. The baby was sleeping in a crib by Mrs. Millington's side, and Mr. Millington with difficulty suppressed a growl of dissatisfaction as he discovered it.

"There is one comfort," he soliloquized, between his sighs of vexation; "it is asleep, and I hope it is still so much under the influence of that opiate Dr. Wright talked of, that it will sleep for hours to come. I am sure I have seen and heard enough of it for one night."

This pleasant reflection quite comforted Mr. Millington, and he was about to prepare for rest when an odd little sound came from the crib. Mr. Millington had heard it often before in his life and knew well enough what it meant. The baby was waking.

“Hush! don’t wake mother,” he said involuntarily, and stepping to the crib he looked down with wrathful eyes on its little occupant. The baby was already wide awake. Its tiny face was puckered and drawn, and it was plainly just ready to cry with all its strength.

“Oh, dear!” Mr. Millington sighed in despair, “this will never do. Sarah will have a headache to-morrow if she is disturbed now. What shall I do?”

No one answered his anxious question, but the baby’s fretfulness increased with every moment, and in sheer desperation the strong man lifted it in his arms, wrapped it awkwardly in a blanket, and taking the lamp walked like a martyr to the kitchen. The grasp of the strong arms seemed to rest the little atom of humanity, and the motion of walking evidently pleased it. It changed its mind about crying, and when Mr. Millington, after placing the lamp on the table, glanced down on it, it cooed with delight, while its little hands and feet moved restlessly, as if to assure him that it wanted action, not rest.

“Like walking, do you?” Mr. Millington inquired dryly, as he interpreted correctly the little one’s expressive signs. “Well, if you will only be quiet, we’ll walk.”

The promise thus given Mr. Millington deemed it wise to fulfil, and back and forth, and up and down the plain, old kitchen he slowly paced, while the baby nestled in his arms, and by its soft, low coos indicated its satisfaction with his performance.

But after a time even walking failed to content the little autocrat; it was hungry, and on looking around the room Mr. Millington soon discovered a cup filled with milk and nicely prepared for the baby’s supper.

It was an odd predicament; but unless Mr. Millington chose to awaken his wife—and he did not consider the insignificant wee creature in his arms worthy of that honor—he must feed it himself; and very awkwardly, but with great care, he proceeded to do so.

The little one took the milk without much ado, and then, too tired and sleepy to maintain its vigil longer, it pressed its little head close against Mr. Millington’s arm, drew two or three long breaths, closed and then opened its drowsy eyes a few times, and at last ceased to struggle and fell into a deep slumber.

With curious eyes Mr. Millington had watched

its efforts to keep awake, and it was with a sense of great relief that he now laid it back in the crib, without disturbing Mrs. Millington, who still slept soundly.

By this time it was early morning. Already from the chimneys of two or three houses near his own the smoke was slowly rising, and, knowing that it would be useless for him to try to sleep now, Mr. Millington went thoughtfully back to the kitchen. He was tired, and by no means jubilant, but he was conscious that his feelings towards the helpless child, so strangely thrown upon him for protection, were oddly changed.

Prudence still whispered, "You cannot afford to keep it," and to the voice of prudence he was firmly resolved to listen; but a deep compassion had taken the place of the anger with which the night before he had thought of the baby. Its very helplessness had conquered him; the few hours spent in nursing had awakened an interest in it, and now, in his own experience, he was proving the truth of one of his favorite theories: if you want to love people you must show kindness to them.

"We will wait awhile, and try to find the baby's friends before we take it to an asylum," he said to his wife at breakfast that morning; and Mrs. Millington's tender heart gladly agreed to his decision. That day a new king was crowned

in the Millington household, and under his imperious sway the old order of things was quickly changed. The weeks followed one another in rapid succession until the first of September dawned, and still the baby continued the centre of interest. He was a bright and winning little creature, and if his presence in the old farm-house added to the cares of the family, it just as certainly added to the happiness of all its members.

Still the mystery of his parentage remained unsolved. Advertisements had been inserted in the leading papers of the nearest city, but no answers were received, and at last all hope that the child ever would be claimed, and its mother—if mother there was—found, had to be abandoned.

There was no mark on the child's body or on its clothing—which was of very soft and fine material—by which it could be identified in the coming years; but an old-fashioned necklace was clasped around its neck, and on the inside of the clasp, which was large and plainly very old, the initials F. G. S. were engraved, and also the Latin words, *Tenax propositi*.

“*Tenax propositi*—tenacious of purpose—that must be a family motto,” said Mr. Crosby, when Mrs. Millington showed him the necklace.

“Do you think so?” Mrs. Millington asked, with much interest. “Well, do you suppose those letters, F. G. S., stand for the baby's name?”

Mr. Crosby turned the clasp and examined it carefully. "They may ; but it is impossible for us to decide that question," he said, after some thought. "The clasp is so old that it was very likely an heirloom, and it may be engraved with a grandmother's or a grandfather's initials. It is all a mystery ; but take good care of this necklace, Mrs. Millington," the good man advised, "for it may prove an important factor some day in the child's life." And in obedience to that advice the necklace was laid carefully away among Mrs. Millington's cherished treasures.

Through all the long, warm, summer days charity had its own sweet way ; but with the blowing of the first chilly winds of autumn Mr. Millington's prudent spirit began to grow uneasy.

"We cannot go on making a plaything of this baby any longer," he said one morning to his wife. "Times are going to be hard this winter ; coal and flour are both higher than usual, and—as generally happens when everything the farmer has to buy is dearest—everything we have to sell is cheaper than usual. Something must be done with this child, and the sooner the better. So get it ready and I will take it to the almshouse. There is a good home for children attached to that institution, I am told, and I think our most sensible course will be to place the child there at once."

"O, Father!" Mrs. Millington-exclaimed, in a pained voice, "I cannot bear to take the dear little creature there. Are you sure that it is really necessary?"

"Yes," Mr. Millington said, with firmness. "I am sure. Our duty to our own children makes it necessary. If we would not have them suffer we must be careful how we give their bread and butter to others."

"They might do with less butter, perhaps—if by butter you mean luxuries—and then maybe there would be plenty of bread for them, and this little one, too," Mrs. Millington suggested timidly.

"Nonsense," Mr. Millington said, in a peevish voice. "I believe that we should be just before we are generous, Sarah, and this is no time for sentiment. We must try to be sensible and look at the sober facts of the situation. That they are sober facts no man possessed of common-sense would deny. We have five children to feed, clothe and educate, and if we do that, as we ought, there will be nothing left for anybody else's child, I can assure you."

"Suppose our last baby had lived," Mrs. Millington said gently; "there would be six children here then. Would you feel still that you had one too many to provide for?"

Mr. Millington's resolute face softened for an

instant, and a tender light shone in his eyes, but it quickly darkened. He had decided that he could not afford to continue to support the little stranger, and he was determined that pity, or sentiment, as he called it, should not influence him to reconsider his decision.

"That child is not here, Sarah," he said, in a moment, "and since it was taken from us it is a clear indication, I think, that we were meant to provide only for five. If we want to keep the children still spared to us safe in our home, we must be careful and keep charity inside our own doors. We cannot care for all the forsaken children in the country, and if we do our duty by our own family neither men nor angels can ask more of us."

"I am not sure about the angels," Mrs. Millington said, in a low voice; but her husband, though he heard, would not notice her words.

"Get the baby ready," he ordered, as he left the house, "and I will take it this afternoon when I go to Millbrook."

Taught by long experience, Mrs. Millington knew that argument would be of no avail with her husband, now that he had decided so firmly on his course, and felt so confident that he was both prudent and right. She made no further effort to influence him to change his purpose, but with many secret regrets she put her house in

order, sent her children to school, without telling them that they were to lose their little playfellow, and about noon dressed the baby for the last time, and with it in her arms started with Mr. Millington for Millbrook.

“ Well,” he said, with a long-drawn breath as they entered the grounds belonging to the almshouse, “ it is a great nuisance this being made, in any way or degree, responsible for other people’s children. I don’t want to be what the Bible calls ‘ my brother’s keeper,’ and I don’t think I ought to be judged as if I were. Whatever becomes of this child, I do not think that I could be required, in justice, to do more for it than I have done. Well, here we are, and now, as the old song says, ‘ the sooner it’s over the sooner to sleep ; ’ so go in, Sarah, and explain the business to the authorities as quickly as you can. I don’t think I’ll go in. I don’t believe there will be any trouble about your leaving the baby.”

Mr. Millington was quite right: there was no trouble, and the baby was soon transferred from Mrs. Millington’s motherly arms to the nursery of the almshouse. With pitiful eyes Mrs. Millington looked around her. Everything was clean—she was glad to see that—but everything was also cold and unloving; and the unfortunate children sheltered there seemed to be regarded as so many little machines. They were to be kept in good

order, and, as soon as possible, sent out into the world to do their share of its work. Well would it be for the world, Mrs. Millington thought sadly, if they did not add also their full share to its misery and sin.

With an intense yearning, even at this last moment, to rescue the child from the fate she feared for it, Mrs. Millington returned to her husband; but he was in no mood to be pleaded with. He hurried her away, and would not himself bestow one farewell glance on the baby. In silence and evident dissatisfaction he drove home.

Great was the mourning among the Millington children that evening, when they understood that the baby had left them.

"Isn't he coming back to-morrow?" asked the youngest, a little curly-headed girl of six, as she climbed upon her father's knee.

"No, Clara."

"Why not?" demanded all the children, in a full chorus.

"Because I do not want him here; I cannot afford to keep him," Mr. Millington explained shortly. "Bring the Bible," he ordered, in a minute; "it is time for evening prayers."

The old leathern-bound Bible was brought; and, slowly and reverently as was his custom, Mr. Millington opened it and began to read. Soon, however, his voice grew husky and indistinct. It

was a well-known passage that he was reading, and he had never before thought it difficult; but now his lips trembled and stammered over a few words, of all on the sacred page perhaps the simplest.

"Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these—ye have done *it* unto me."

"Unto me!" And he had thrown that little one upon the cold charity of the world and left it in an almshouse.

Mr. Millington closed the Bible.

"I—I do not feel like reading to-night," he said, in a troubled voice.

The children and their mother waited. Prayers always followed the Bible-reading, but to-night Mr. Millington discovered soon that he did not feel like praying.

"We will repeat the Lord's Prayer," he said.

Reverently the little group waited for him to lead them; but the first two words he uttered appalled him. Never before had he understood their meaning as he did at that moment.

"Our Father"—his and that little child's. How could he answer for that child when, in the "time of the restitution of all things," its Father and his asked him to account for it?

Conscience-smitten—at the conclusion of the prayer—Mr. Millington took his hat and went out, without waiting to give his children the

good-night kiss with which he always sent them to bed.

That night, in the old Millington homestead, was a long and troubled one. The children went to bed grieving for the baby, and the two youngest cried themselves to sleep. Mrs. Millington was tired, but the rest she needed came to neither body nor mind. She missed the baby; care for it had grown very sweet to her motherly heart, and by the side of its vacant crib she wept more bitter tears than she had shed since her own baby went from her to the safe shelter of its Saviour's arms.

Mr. Millington did not go to bed. He did not feel like sleeping, he said, almost crossly, when his wife asked him why he did not retire.

He fought over the old battle between what he called charity and prudence, and common-sense and sentiment, many times that night. With all the resolution and strength of will that he possessed—and by nature he was very inflexible—he sought to be prudent and sensible; but he could not forget the solemn “inasmuch,” that seemed printed in letters of light in his Testament; and very early in the morning, before the pink of sunrise had passed into the white light of the full day, he went out, harnessed his horse, and took the road leading to Millbrook.

Mrs. Millington and the children were at breakfast when he returned. They had been greatly

surprised at his unusual absence, but they were still more surprised when he came in, and without a word placed the baby in Mrs. Millington's lap.

The poor little creature had been very homesick. It had cried and cried until they thought it must be ill, they told Mr. Millington at the almshouse. Now, as it recognized Mrs. Millington, with a great sob, that told how much it was relieved, it nestled in her arms, and for a long time no coaxing of the children could tempt it from her.

"It is ours," Mr. Millington said solemnly, as they all stood around it. "It is to be your brother, children, and your mother's and my son. Now, bring me the Bible."

Once more the Bible was brought, and the family grouped themselves for morning prayers. Was it by chance—or through the guidance of that Spirit who watches all our lives, and in so many ways gives counsel and comfort—that the Bible opened at an unusual place? Mr. Millington did not know, but with a great and glad throb of the heart he read these words: "Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give *thee* thy wages."

"We will do it, wife," Mr. Millington said, with a tender light on his face, as he called Mrs. Millington to his side and showed her the old command. "I do not know what the wages will

be," he continued thoughtfully, "but we will obey the Lord, and trust in him, and I do not believe, after all, that sharing our daily bread with this little one will ever impoverish us or our children."

"No," Mrs. Millington said, in a glad voice, as she stooped and kissed the baby, "no, we will lose nothing by being compassionate, for our Father is a faithful promiser."

CHAPTER III.

OPINIONS.

“Be bounteous in thy faith, for not misspent
Is confidence unto the Father lent.
Thy need is sown and rooted for his rain.”

—*George Macdonald.*

IN a little country village, news, whether good or bad, is a rapid traveller; ears to receive it and tongues to publish it are never wanting, and in less than twenty-four hours after the baby's triumphant return to its home everybody in Hermitsville knew that the Millingtons had decided to adopt the child; and many and widely different were the comments of friends and neighbors upon their decision.

Throughout the summer the baby's arrival at the Millingtons had been the most interesting topic of conversation Hermitsville had known; but the excitement occasioned by its advent had subsided gradually; and even when at its height it had never equalled the interest aroused now by the knowledge that the little one was, as the Millington children said, going to be one of them. Everybody in Hermitsville had supposed that

Mr. Millington would soon place the child in an asylum ; and everybody now was quite ready to doubt the wisdom of his doing otherwise.

The weekly sewing society was to meet the next day, and, fortunately for those who had not yet seen the baby, at Mrs. Millington's.

"It's a good thing it's coming here," sagaciously remarked Miss Charity Goodman, Mrs. Millington's nearest neighbor, when she ran in that morning to borrow a cup of yeast. "Curious people are a good deal like hungry ones, I think : you have generally got to satisfy them before you can have much comfort ; and I must say, Mrs. Millington, that if there was as much money in Hermitville as there is curiosity about you this morning, we should all be pretty rich."

"People are welcome to their curiosity," Mrs. Millington returned, with some spirit, "and of course they will have their own opinions and express them too ; but at least my conscience does not reproach me."

"No, I should hope not," Miss Charity answered consolingly ; "and really, Mrs. Millington, I don't know as anybody—when it comes to the point—reproaches you ; but you see you are not doing precisely as most folks would in your circumstances ; and so, of course, if you are brave enough to do a singular thing, you'll have to be brave enough to bear to be talked about. But,

la, it don't make any difference : folks will talk no matter what you do. If you had left that baby in the almshouse, of course they would have called you heartless ; and now that you are going to keep it, they will all, with one accord, call you foolish. You can't control tongues any more than you can the wind, Mrs. Millington, and though tongues can cut pretty sharp sometimes, the wind is just as much worth minding as they are. Well, good-morning, Mrs. Millington. I'll be over early this afternoon, and I guess we will have a pretty full meeting of the society."

Miss Goodman's guess proved as correct as the proverbial Yankee one. The afternoon was lovely, and full of the golden light with which September loves to glorify the hills and fields. At an early hour Mrs. Millington's parlor was filled with the members of the sewing society ; and while busy hands cut, basted, and sewed garments for a missionary box, busy tongues enlarged on all that had occurred recently in Hermitsville, and soon, by common consent, touched upon the baby.

"Where is he, Mrs. Millington? Wont you bring him in and let us see him?" pleaded two or three young girls ; and, yielding to their wishes, Mrs. Millington went out and soon returned with the baby. He had been frolicking with the children, and his little face was still dimpled with

smiles, while his tiny hands still grasped the drumsticks with which he had been playing "rat-a-tat" on the kitchen table. Now, when he found himself surrounded by so many strangers, his innocent eyes looked from one to another with an expression of serious wonder for a moment, but then shyness conquered him, and dropping his playthings he clasped his arms tightly around Mrs. Millington's neck, hid his face on her shoulder, and only at intervals condescended to look soberly up at the group of young girls and curious matrons that gathered around him.

All the eyes in the room were busy for a few moments, and then sewing and talking began again. "He is a nice little fellow," said a sensible and practical-looking woman, whose opinions the whole society usually endorsed; "but now, Mrs. Millington, do you really mean that you are going to keep him, and do for him just as if he was truly your own child?"

"Yes," Mrs. Millington answered calmly, "that is our present intention. What would you do?"

"It's a dreadful risky business—adopting other folks' children," spoke up an energetic little woman, as she clipped off a needleful of thread with her scissors, and caught up Mrs. Millington's question before Mrs. Wise could answer it. "There are a good many investments that don't never return us nothin' but disappointment; and

I must say adopting children does seem to me altogether too uncertain and disappointin' an investment for sensible people to make, when they aint in no way compelled to. Your own children aint any too apt to overwhelm you with gratitude, and other folks' children are pretty sure to be like the other folks—all for themselves."

"I do not like to hear you talk so, Miss Harding," said Mrs. Crosby, the minister's wife. "You ought never to discourage any one who is undertaking a noble and self-denying task. This child may prove a great blessing to Mrs. Millington."

"Well, if he does, he will prove an exception to most of the adopted children I've heard of," Miss Harding said, with energy.

"Have you such a thing as a New Testament in your house, Miss Harding?" asked one of the younger women now, with a gleam of mischief in her eyes.

"Yes, of course, I have," returned Miss Harding. "Why do you ask? are you in want of one?"

"O no, thank you; I was only wondering if you ever had read of the blessing promised to those who received the little children."

"I guess I've read it as often as you have," flashed back Miss Harding, "but I believe in treating the Bible with reverence. I don't approve of dragging it into the discussion of questions that ought to be settled by common-sense."

“Christian common-sense, I think you mean, Miss Harding,” Mrs. Crosby softly suggested, “and you know we need the Bible to teach us that.”

All this while Mrs. Wise had been watching the baby, and deliberating over Mrs. Millington’s question. Now she felt ready to speak.

“Well,” she said, in a slow and very distinct voice, “you will be shocked, of course, Mrs. Crosby, at my words; but Mrs. Millington is my husband’s third cousin, and where one is related one ought to be privileged to speak plainly; and I believe it is my duty to say just what I think about this matter; and I must say that I should not go to the Bible to find out what I ought to do in a case like this.”

Mrs. Wise paused and glanced around the room. Miss Harding nodded approvingly, and Mrs. Crosby looked pained, but no one spoke, save a mischievous girl, who presumed to ask: “Where would you go, Mrs. Wise? to the almshouse?”

Mrs. Wise silenced the girl with one stern glance, and with great deliberation proceeded: “I might think it prudent to go to some of my friends for advice, but I should, at least, consult the plain, sound common-sense that I believe we are meant to settle such questions with; and”—with a sharp look at Mrs. Millington—“I would consider, first, if my farm was free from mortgage; and then I

would go to my bank-book and see what account that had to give. Adopted children are pretty expensive luxuries, and you have no right to an indulgence you cannot afford, you know. And then"—with another severe glance at Mrs. Millington—"I would consider my own children, and make sure that my charity to others did not conflict with my duty to them."

"There, certainly, is good, sound common-sense for you," Miss Harding said approvingly.

"The common-sense of this world is like fire—a good servant, but a hard master," Mrs. Crosby said thoughtfully. "We are in danger of growing very selfish when we consult it alone, and forget to ask, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?'"

All this while the little creature, so happily ignorant of the discussion he was exciting, had been clinging to Mrs. Millington's neck. Now he suddenly raised his head, turned and looked seriously at Mrs. Wise for a second, and then, with a low, happy coo, lifted his tiny hand, and began softly to pat Mrs. Millington's cheek.

The baby's gesture, so expressive of helplessness and confidence, touched Mrs. Millington, and unconsciously she drew him closer, while with much composure she answered Mrs. Wise.

"Mr. Millington and myself have been as anxious to be prudent as even you could have been, Mrs. Wise," she said, "and we have considered,

carefully, every one of the questions you have suggested."

"And found you could answer them all satisfactorily, I suppose," Mrs. Wise replied, with, perhaps, a faint suspicion of malice; for, as she very well knew, her own husband held a mortgage on Mr. Millington's farm.

"No," Mrs. Millington acknowledged, with quiet dignity; "we found them very hard to answer. Our farm is mortgaged—everybody knows that; we have no bank-book to consult, and, next to the service we owe our Heavenly Father, our first duty is to the children he has given us. We would be the last to deny that."

"Then, why," Mrs. Wise demanded, in a sharper voice than even the fact that her husband was Mrs. Millington's third cousin warranted—"why, in the name of conscience, are you going to adopt this outcast child?"

There were tears in Mrs. Millington's eyes, though a happy smile played around her lips, as she answered: "Because we have done one thing that you have not advised, Mrs. Wise. We have consulted our Bible, and found there that it is safe always to do God's will and trust in his promises."

There was a little pause, and then, like one determined to have the last word, Mrs. Wise said: "Yes, it is always safe to do God's will, of course;

but you must know it before you can do it; and are you"—with an emphasis very expressive of doubt on the word—"sure that you know it now, Mrs. Millington?"

Just then Mr. Crosby, who had been standing for several minutes unnoticed near the open door, came forward.

"Let me answer your question, Mrs. Wise," he said pleasantly; "and for my answer let me quote this little verse from the New Testament: 'It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.' If that is true—and we believe our Bible—then can we doubt that, when God sends a little child, in training for immortality, into this world, it is his will that all good influences should be thrown around it, and all possible efforts made to train it, so that it may prove a blessing and be blessed in the world? This friendless child may be a great comfort and honor to his kind protectors some day. Is he named yet, Mrs. Millington?"

"No," Mrs. Millington answered, "we have never called him anything but baby."

"King will suit him soon almost as well as baby," Mr. Crosby said, with a smile, as he noticed the imperious way in which the child was now repelling or permitting the advances of several of the young girls. "He is a born prince, I believe, though his kingdom is lost. But, prince

or peasant, a name is indispensable. Ladies, come, who can suggest a good one?"

There was a chorus of replies to this question, and name after name was proposed, only to be rejected by Mrs. Millington.

"I do not care to give him a fine, romantic name that will sound as if he had stepped out of a novel," she said sensibly. "Of course, for his family name, he will take ours. I do not believe"—and she smiled as she glanced at Miss Harding—"that we need be afraid to trust him with it; but for his Christian name"—and she turned appealingly to Mr. Crosby—"I would like something plain but expressive. Something"—she explained in a voice too low for any one but the minister to hear—"that will help me always to remember whose will it is that he should belong to us."

"I understand," Mr. Crosby said, with quick sympathy. "There are a great many names that are full of significance. Let me see. Theodore—Nathanael—they have precious meanings. Ah! here is one, better than all others—John."

"John! that plain, old-fashioned name!" pouted a young girl, who was inclined to be romantic.

"Yes, John, 'the gracious gift of God,'" Mr. Crosby answered. "Other names can be interpreted the gift of God, but only this one means the gracious gift. Do you know what 'gracious'

means?" and he looked at the young girl who had spoken last.

"Oh, please don't ask me for definitions!" she answered quickly.

"No? Well, I will ask the dictionary. Here it is," he said, in a moment. "'Gracious—abounding in mercy, manifesting love.' Yes, if Mrs. Millington approves, we will christen this little one John.

"Yes, John is the best name for this baby," Mrs. Millington said, with much satisfaction.

Gradually the curiosity about him subsided; and, though there were some who for a long time continued to affirm, with Miss Harding, that it was "a risky business" for Mr. Millington to adopt him, the majority of the inhabitants of Hermitsville acknowledged their neighbor's right to do as he pleased, and soon accepted the child as one of the Millington children. And as the uneventful years went by, and they saw him treated, in all respects, like one born to the rights of the family, they ceased to speak openly of the mystery that surrounded him; though still, sometimes of winter nights, they told his story in confidential whispers around their firesides.

CHAPTER IV.

DISCORDS.

“Often by illusions cheated,
Often baffled and defeated
In the tasks to be completed,
He, by toil and self-denial,
To the highest shall attain.”—*Longfellow*.

THE years, with all their struggles and defeats and victories, their unwritten histories and deeds of world-renown, went swiftly by, until ten summers had passed since the eventful June day when Mrs. Millington found the strange baby in her cradle.

Those years had dealt very gently with the Millingtons. No sorrow or serious trouble had come near them, but almost unbroken health and prosperity had been granted to them; and had Mr. Millington been a believer in the old-time stories of fairies and brownies, he might have looked upon the friendless child under his protection as a veritable “Lob-Lie-By-The-Fire;” for, from the day when charity had triumphed over selfishness, and he had opened his heart and adopted him as his own, he had been prospered in

all the works of his hands. His crops were always abundant, his flocks and herds profitable, and his investments sure to prove successful. The mortgage on his farm had long ago been paid ; and, had Mrs. Millington been so disposed, she could have boasted now of a bank-book, in which the sums recorded, though not large, were all well deserved and gained by honest labor. But the Millingtons were not boastful, and so, as the years, so full of tranquil happiness, went by, they only thanked the Lord more gratefully for their past and present mercies, and trusted him more fearlessly for the needs of the unknown future.

They never had read of fairies and brownies, and never were fanciful enough to look upon their adopted son as anything more than an ordinary boy ; but often, when in their Bible-reading their eyes rested on the familiar passage : "I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake," they would look thoughtfully upon the boy, and humbly own that the promises of the Lord were sure, and happy were those who trusted in them.

The Millington children had all reached that period of life when childish things are outgrown and put away. The oldest daughter was married, and happy in a home of her own. William, the oldest boy, had mastered his trade, and was looking forward to the time when he would own his

shop and be himself the master of others. Henry, the second son, was—as Mrs. Millington loved to call him—his father's right-hand man. Fond of his home, and of the old fields where he had played in childhood, he asked no higher lot than to live among them and some day call them his own. There were only two more Millington children, and they were both girls. One was eighteen years old, and already proud of her skill and success as a dressmaker. The youngest, Clara, was a sunny-hearted girl of sixteen, who cared, as she frankly owned, very little for books, but delighted in bright colors and pretty handiwork, and had decided fully in her own mind that she would be a milliner.

Such, at this period of our narrative, was the Millington family. Scrupulously honest, faithful in every detail of their daily duties, self-respecting, and meriting the respect of all who knew them, they were good citizens, sincere Christians, and kind neighbors. Abiding peacefully in the station in which it had pleased God to place them, they had no dreams nor aspirations beyond it; and, well content to follow in their ancestors' footsteps, they had no troublesome desires to find out new and untrodden paths for themselves.

The youngest child in this contented household, little John Millington, as he was always called, was as unlike his adopted brothers and sisters as a

skylark is unlike a sparrow. He was now a handsome and manly little fellow of ten, perfectly healthy, and with a fine, erect carriage that sometimes made Clara playfully call him, "Little Prince Proud Foot."

Trained from his early childhood to work and obedience, he never thought of rebelling against the will of his parents, as he called, and believed Mr. and Mrs. Millington; and it was Mr. Millington's boast that John was thoroughly trustworthy, and that what he was ordered to do he did well, and never carelessly slighted.

At the same time, the boy in the Millington family was like the one discordant note in an otherwise well-tuned musical instrument. He was a good boy, they said, and they loved him and felt proud of him; but, while that was all true, it was equally true that they did not understand him, and already that sad fact was beginning to separate him from them, and to make his life lonely. The boy was not one of them. Young as he was, he looked at things from a standpoint far removed from theirs. Between his tastes and theirs there was little sympathy, and between his day-dreams and theirs as much resemblance as there is between the tree that has stood for long years in the forest, and the shipmast, whose weather-stained wood tells of winds and waves successfully breasted, of broad seas crossed and strange shores visited.

The boy was fond of reading; words, even when he did not understand them, had a strange charm for him, and the few books and papers that fell in his way were treasured by him and pored over until he knew them almost by heart. The commonest picture was to him like a door through which he passed into a beautiful world; while music, though he could not describe its influence upon him, touched him, as it only touches those who are made to hunger for it, and who ought to be uplifted by it.

From his secluded life he heard little music, either good or bad. The singing in church and Sunday-school, with an old-fashioned melodeon accompaniment, was all he knew of the wonderful sweetness and melody of the human voice; and the passing of an old organ-grinder through Hermitsville, occasionally in the summer, was an event that thrilled his young heart with delight for the time, and always left him full of regretful, though childish longings. From house to house he would follow the wonderful magician, who, by simply turning a crank, could fill the air with such harmony; and the height of the boy's ambition was, some time, in that enchanted future when he should be a man—to own a hand-organ, and make for himself all the music his hungry soul craved. He had never heard or even seen a piano, and though once, at the village store, he

had seen a fiddle, he had never, in his wildest dreams, imagined the melody that a master's touch could draw from one. He was simply an ignorant little country boy, as yet far from conscious of the needs and cravings of his own nature; but in the summer of his eleventh year there came a day that through all his after-life he never forgot; for it was not only to him a beautiful illustration of the power and harmony of sound, but it was, also, a revelation to him, of much that might be possible for him in life, and an awakening in his soul of desires that would never slumber again.

It was a July afternoon; there was no school, and Mr. Millington took John with him on a drive to Millbrook, and on arriving there left him to amuse himself, while he attended to his business. It was the height of the summer season, and the little mountain village of Millbrook was crowded with gay city boarders.

The large hotel, with its thronged piazzas and signs of busy life and activity, looked very attractive to the country boy; so attractive that, as he was passing by, he stopped near the gate and gazed with wondering eyes at this his first glimpse of a world and society, unlike any he had ever known or seen.

He was still hanging on the gate, when through an open window, out on the still, sweet air, came

the tones of a violin. The instrument was in the hands of one whose name throughout the world is associated with its music, and, though the boy did not know that, he was thrilled through every nerve with its pathos and melody.

It seemed to the little listener like something magical and unearthly, for at one moment the tones were free and glad as the voice of a bird, and then, responsive to the will of the player, they grew low and tremulous as the moan of an aching soul.

Spellbound and entranced, the boy listened until the wonderful playing ceased; and then, with the one thought that he must find out where it came from, and what made it, he ran through the gate, and up the broad walk, to the open window of a small private parlor, from whence he thought the strains had come.

His ear had guided him well, and as he leaned on the low window-seat, and looked longingly in, he saw a gentleman standing in the centre of the room, and holding a violin, across which he was softly and lovingly drawing the bow. He was alone in the room, for though many curious and delighted listeners were constantly passing and repassing the window, no one had ventured to intrude on his retirement.

Now, as he saw the boy, he paused, half-raised his hand as if to warn him off, and then—drawn

by the soul in the young face—he came to the window and looked searchingly at him for a moment.

That moment's scrutiny seemed to please him, for after it, in a grave, but not unkind voice, he said: "What are you doing here, boy? What do you want?"

The boy was too intensely interested and too absorbed in the music to be self-conscious.

"That," he said eagerly, pointing to the instrument the gentleman still held; "what is it?"

"This?" and the musician touched it with a gentle hand, almost as if it were human and he loved it. "This? it is a violin, boy. Did you never see one before?"

"Yes, but it didn't do like that;" and the child watched the magical thing, in which it seemed to him a human voice must be imprisoned, with hungry eyes. "Was it that, that sung and cried just now?"

"Sung and cried?" the stranger repeated. "Ay, boy, if you had a soul to understand it, it did both."

"O sir," and the little fellow looked up appealingly into the serious face that was watching him, "wont you make it do so again? It hurt me, but it made me feel happy too. I must hear it again;" and tears filled the earnest eyes that pleaded more eloquently than the young voice.

“Come in here,” and the musician motioned for the boy to enter through the window. “Now,” he said, as he obeyed and stood beside him, “tell me your name.”

“John, sir, John Millington.”

“And you love music, do you?”

The little fellow pondered the question for a few seconds.

“I think I must love it,” he then said. “It hurts me to hear it; it makes me choke and want to cry sometimes; but I’d rather be hurt by it than do without it. Isn’t that loving it?” and the clear eyes looked innocently up at the stranger.

“Yes, almost too well for your own peace,” was the low, moody answer.

John did not reply, and the gentleman tightened the strings of his instrument, and ran his fingers absently over them for a minute; and then in a lighter tone he asked:

“Well, my little man, have you been hurt enough for one day, or would you like to suffer a little more?”

John hesitated a second, the peculiar question puzzled him. Then, as its meaning dawned upon him, his face lit up with pleasure and enthusiasm.

“O yes, sir, if you please,” he said eagerly. “I want to hear it more than anything else in the world.”

"Sit down then, and keep still," the gentleman said, as he pointed to a low cushion.

Gladly the boy obeyed, and sitting down, he crossed his feet, folded his arms—and with a look on his face that made the musician think of a half-awakened soul waiting for the word that should make it fully conscious—waited for the music.

Melody after melody the violinist played, closing at last with the slow, exquisite chords of Händel's "Largo," and still the boy sat at his feet drinking in the sweet sounds as if his whole soul was thirsty for them.

"There," the musician said, as the last note of the beautiful "Largo" died away—"there, my little man, that will do for to-day, I think."

With a long breath the boy came back to the realities of life and rose to his feet.

"I must go now," he said, with simple directness, "my father will be looking for me, but I'll never forget this day, and I thank you very much. May I take it a minute?" and he extended his hand longingly for the violin.

Without a word the gentleman gave it to him, and the boy examined it with an interest at once loving and intelligent. He noted every part very closely, and then took the bow and gave that the same careful inspection.

"Perhaps I can make one," he said, as he returned it and looked doubtfully at the stranger.

"Perhaps," was the quiet answer, that neither encouraged nor discouraged.

That it did not positively forbid was enough, and, with his mind full of that great "perhaps," little John Millington said good-bye to the famous musician, who had opened a new world to him, and who—though he was never to see him again—had exerted an influence upon him that would be lasting as his life.

For weeks after that eventful day the boy's mind brooded constantly upon the possibility of making a violin. He easily sketched a rude model of one on pasteboard, and with great care he collected materials that he thought would answer his purpose.

It was a long, and patient, and painful work. Sometimes his little heart exulted in what he was accomplishing, and then, at other times, both head and heart would ache from discouragement, while bitter tears would rain down upon the task he despaired of completing. Perhaps, even if he had failed, the work would have been good discipline for the boy, because of the persistent effort, and patient painstaking, he was forced to exert.

But at last, one dull November Saturday afternoon, the hour of triumph came. The violin was finished; and, rude though it was, the boy's heart beat with a greater and more exultant pride

than he knew when, long years after, he held a real Stradivari in his hand and called it his.

He had been working in a rough room over the granary, where tools were kept, and where it was easy for him to labor at his task without being questioned or watched; but now, that the precious instrument was finished, he tucked it inside his loose jacket, clasped both arms tightly over it, and carried it in boyish pride to the house and placed it among his most treasured possessions in his own little bedroom.

After that, whenever he had a spare hour, little John was sure to steal away with his beloved violin. The family had all seen it, and admired it, or laughed at it, according to their natures. No one had objected to it, although Mr. Millington looked at it with very sober eyes.

"I don't believe," he remarked, in a discontented voice to his wife, "I don't believe fiddle-playing ever pays as well as ploughing when it comes to the matter-of-fact question of earning one's daily bread."

"The child is not yet old enough to earn his daily bread," Mrs. Millington answered, in her gentle, motherly way.

Mr. Millington could not gainsay her, and there the matter rested until one dreary December Sabbath, when a great loss fell on little John: the prelude to many other losses, and the begin-

ning of many struggles, as well as of many self-conquests.

It was late in the afternoon of the short winter day. The little boy had been to church and Sunday-school, and now—leaving the rest of the family reading quietly in the warm sitting-room, he went to his room, took his fiddle, and climbed the steep stairs leading to the old garret, in order to be alone and where no one could hear, or be disturbed by, his music.

The garret was a dark and dreary place; its rafters were festooned with cobwebs, and hung with bunches of boneset, Indian posy, and other old-fashioned herbs, that, if brushed against, filled the air with a dry, powdery dust, and emitted a faint, sweet fragrance, that awakened memories of summer days in the fields and woods. Old furniture, old clothes, old papers, all the old things that for more than a century had been used and thrown aside in the old farm-house, but that yet, for some reason wise or otherwise, were considered too valuable to be destroyed, were preserved in that old garret. Everything there was rusty, faded, dingy, and ancient, save this little boy, who, with his precious fiddle, was seated on a pile of old rag carpet, in a dusty corner, where the light of the December afternoon fell full upon him from a western window.

That day in Sunday-school they had sung,

"There is a Happy Land," and now the boy was softly humming the simple tune, and trying to draw it from his rude instrument. It squeaked, and groaned, and uttered many discordant sounds, but, not at all discouraged, the child played on. His imagination had fairly transported him to a far-off happy land, and, blind and deaf to everything around him, he drew his bow and hummed his tune, until suddenly a heavy hand fell on his shoulder, and a stern voice demanded:

"John, what are you doing?"

"Only playing my fiddle, father," the little boy answered.

"Playing the fiddle on Sunday! That's pretty work for a respectable boy, isn't it?" Mr. Millington said severely.

"I—I—didn't think there was any harm in it," John pleaded, in excuse.

"No, of course you didn't," Mr. Millington said, while his face and voice were both stern and threatening. "You are bewitched by that fiddle, I believe. It has made an idle, do-nothing boy of you, and now it has tempted you to break the Sabbath. I don't know where you would find a more dangerous plaything, and still, you are so infatuated with it, that you don't think there is any harm in doing as you have done this afternoon. I am ashamed of you, John. Don't you think you ought to be ashamed of yourself?"

The little boy trembled, but he grasped his fiddle more tightly, and answered truthfully :

“No, sir. They make music in heaven on Sunday.”

“Well, you have made discords enough on earth for one Sunday, I think, and I cannot allow this state of things to go on any longer. I never have approved of this fiddle, but I did not want to resort to extreme measures at first, and so I have waited, John, and watched to see whether it would really do you any hurt. Now, I’m satisfied. I don’t want you playing the fiddle on Sabbath days, when you ought to be studying the catechism, and neither do I want you playing it on week days, when you ought to be working, and forming industrious habits for the future. Here, give me that fiddle, John.”

“Now understand,” Mr. Millington proceeded, as the boy reluctantly obeyed him and resigned his treasure, “understand, John, that what I do now, I do from a sense of duty. I am sorry to make you suffer, but I am your best friend, and I feel responsible for your character, and I must correct your faults.”

John did not answer, but with a troubled face he stood before Mr. Millington, and with a great fear for the fate of his fiddle he watched his movements.

Slowly Mr. Millington turned the fiddle over

and examined it. "You were ingenious to make this, John," he said, in a serious voice, "very ingenious; but you must learn to employ your ingenuity in manufacturing useful things. Talents are to be traded with, the Bible tells us, you know, and so we must not waste them on trifles. There"—and, raising the slender bow, with one grasp of his strong hands Mr. Millington snapped it in two.

The boy's face worked pitifully, and his whole body trembled.

"O," he pleaded, as Mr. Millington dropped the broken bow and, placing the violin on the floor, raised his foot to crush it—"O father, don't, please don't break it."

"I must," Mr. Millington said solemnly. "It might ruin you forever, if I did not;" and as he spoke the weight of his heavy foot fell pitilessly on the slender toy on which the boy had toiled so patiently, and over which he had dreamed so many childish but happy dreams.

It was the first great trial in the boy's life, and as he looked at the shattered fragments of his treasure, it seemed to him that his heart was crushed as well as his fiddle. There was a choking sensation in his throat and he could not speak. Indeed words, as he well knew, would do him no good; and turning from the well-meaning but mistaken man who had wounded him so

deeply, he threw himself face downward on the old carpet, and sobbed in an agony of pain such as in all his young life he never had known before.

That rude, rough fiddle had been the most precious thing he possessed, and he loved it as only a child can love a soulless thing. To him it was as dear as if it possessed life, and to part with it seemed like parting with a portion of himself. And yet his pain was not all caused by his love for his fiddle. Underneath that love there was a strong and passionate sense of justice—now for the first time aroused—that, if Mr. Millington had been aware of it, might have relieved his fears that the boy never would be anything but an idle and dreamy sentimentalist.

But the workings of that mysterious thing, a child's soul, were hidden from Mr. Millington, and after watching the poor boy's convulsive sobs for a few moments, he turned, and with a sober and resolved face, went back to the sitting-room. To his surprise he found Mr. Crosby there. The good minister had called to see his deacon about some church matters, and now, in his perplexity, Mr. Millington confided to him the story of the fiddle.

"I had to break it," the stern man said, with emphasis, in conclusion. "I do not believe in song-singing, music-making men. They are very seldom sensible and practical business men.

They are sure, almost always, to shilly-shally, and fail when it comes to a question of real, hard, matter-of-fact work, and I will not have any boy under my roof grow up with such habits and tastes, if I can help it. I think a great deal of this boy; he is a good child; but it troubles me to see that, as he grows older, he does not seem to care for anything except reading story-books, and see-sawing on fiddlestrings. Such boys are sure to make idle and sentimental men; they are not reliable; they always want some one to be a crutch for them to lean upon, and I do not believe the work of the world is ever done or even helped by them."

"Shades of all the great song-masters forgive us," Mr. Crosby thought; but he answered in his quiet and pleasant voice: "There are a great many different kinds of work to be done in this world, and each kind requires a different nature and mind to perform it successfully. Music is one of God's most precious gifts to this world, Mr. Millington, and how many souls it has softened and saved we shall never know, until, in the light of eternity, the secrets of time are revealed to us. Do not try to destroy that boy's love for music, my friend; rather let him cultivate it, so that it may be a means of blessing others, as well as himself. Where is he?"

"I left him in the garret," Mr. Millington re-

plied, and then, like a man whose strong prejudices would allow him to see but one side of the question, he said emphatically: "I tell you, Mr. Crosby, if that boy grows up, as he promises to grow now, he will be nothing more nor less than a sentimental, lackadaisical, do-nothing fellow; and you know, as well as I do, what kind of blessings such men are to themselves and their families."

"Yes, I know," Mr. Crosby said, with a little sigh for the narrowness of mind and vision, that so often makes even a good man's pathway to heaven full of mistakes. "I know. Your view of this matter has much truth to support it, Mr. Millington, but it is a truth that, like the old shield, has two sides; and it may be that while you see the silver side, the golden one is hidden from you. I hope better things of this boy than you predict. May I go up and see him?"

"I have no objection," Mr. Millington rather ungraciously answered: and Mr. Crosby, who knew the old house well, went with gentle steps to the garret.

John still lay in the corner where Mr. Millington had left him. He was not crying now, but every few moments a long, sobbing breath told of the passion that was not subdued, but only by a strong effort suppressed. Mr. Crosby's face grew very grave as he looked at him. He had

never lost his interest in the boy, and it was a very gentle hand that he now placed on his head.

"Look up, my dear little fellow," he said, "I want to talk to you."

Very slowly John raised his head, and turned his swollen and tear-stained face towards Mr. Crosby.

"What is the matter?" Mr. Crosby asked, with the kind thought that it would be a relief to the child to give utterance to his trouble. "You look very unhappy, my boy; tell me what has happened."

He expected to hear a long and childish account of the affair, but, instead, the boy said passionately:

"Father broke my fiddle, Mr. Crosby, and it was unjust."

"Unjust?" Mr. Crosby repeated, a little surprised to find that argument, instead of consolation, was what the boy required. "My dear child, you belong to your father; he had a right to break your fiddle if he thought it best to do so."

"But I made it," John insisted, "and it was mine, Mr. Crosby."

"And you are his," Mr. Crosby said firmly.

John did not attempt to reply, but as the minister watched him he saw that his outraged sense of justice was making him very rebellious.

“My dear little boy,” Mr. Crosby said now, as he sat down and drew the child closer to his side, “you must not accuse your father of injustice; you must believe that he is wiser than you are, and that in all he does he seeks only your good.”

John looked very anxious. “I know I ought to believe so,” he said, in a troubled voice, “and I know father is wise and good, but—he didn’t make that fiddle, Mr. Crosby, and I cannot think people just, when my reason tells me they are unjust, can I?”

O dear, Mr. Crosby thought, am I arguing with a future judge? There is little danger of this boy becoming a sentimentalist; he is far more likely to be a legalist.

“Can I?” John repeated anxiously.

“No,” Mr. Crosby said kindly, “but you must remember, my child, that a little boy’s reason is too weak to be trusted far, and the boy, himself, is often too ignorant to understand the difference between justice and injustice. Older and wiser minds must decide all serious questions for you, and if people—as may sometimes happen—do make mistakes, and treat you with injustice, there is one thing you can do, my boy; you can forgive them.”

“When they are really and truly unjust?” the little boy asked, in a doubtful voice.

“Yes. Then you will prove that you are

really and truly a Christian boy. You and I, John, have a dear friend in heaven, who suffered more from unjust men than any one else who ever lived in this world; and when his suffering was greatest he could still pray, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Don't you want to be like that dear friend, my boy?"

The little boy's heart was softened, and his lips trembled as he answered: "It isn't easy to be like him, Mr. Crosby."

"No," and the face that was watching the boy grew very tender in its sympathy, "no, it is not easy, my boy, but the harder the battle the greater the honor for the soldier if he wins the victory. And now," Mr. Crosby said very gravely, "I want you to try, like a Christian boy, to put all these wrong thoughts about your father's injustice out of your mind. Remember that you are a little boy, and cannot understand all your father's reasons for what he does, and try to please your heavenly Father by honoring and obeying your earthly one; will you?"

There was a moment of silent thought on the boy's part, and of silent prayer on the minister's, and then John answered, "Yes, sir, I know I ought to do so, and I will try and obey my father, for he has always been very good to me, and"—with a trembling lip—"I know when he broke my fiddle he thought he was doing right,

but—but Mr. Crosby, I don't believe I will ever be able to think things just when they are unjust."

"I hope you never will be," Mr. Crosby said, with a smile; "only remember that you are a very ignorant little boy to-day, and must learn to know the things that are just from those that are unjust, before you will have any right to presume to decide between them. Good-bye now, my boy." And leaving John in the garret Mr. Crosby went thoughtfully back to the sitting-room.

"You need have no fear that that boy will make a weak or a sentimental man," Mr. Crosby said, a little later, when he was parting with Mr. Millington. "His strong sense of justice is to his character what granite is to the earth. A nature like his might harden early, and grow bitter and unloving in life's conflicts, if it were not for the softening influences to which, so mercifully, he is made susceptible. I thank God to-night, that he has given this child, together with what promises to develop into a strong legal mind, this intense love for music and all beautiful things. To me it is another illustration of that many-sided and far-reaching truth, that our Maker, in apportioning our talents, gives to each 'according to his several ability.'"

CHAPTER V.

REVELATIONS.

“The dial

Receives many shades, and each points to the sun ;
The shadows are many, the sunlight is one.
Looking up to this light, which is common to all,
And down to those shadows on each side that fall
In time's silent circle, so various for each,
Is it nothing to know that they never can reach
So far, but that light lies beyond them forever ? ”

—*Owen Meredith.*

IT was quite dark in the old garret when the little boy brushed away his last tears, and, after picking up the fragments of his shattered treasure, groped his way down the steep stairs, and joined the family in the sitting-room.

Without a word he went to the fire, dropped the bits of wood into it, and stood quietly by watching until they were burned to ashes. He had no thought of acting for effect, and he was too young to moralize, or grow sentimental over his loss. He had simply accepted the facts of the present, from which he could not hope to escape. Some day—and his young heart throbbed with exultation at the thought of that wonderful some

day—when he was a man, and it was right for him to do so, he would own a violin, and satisfy his soul with its melody ; but now, while he was a little boy, he would try to please his father, and not complain because he could not, at the same time, please himself.

It was a brave resolve for a young boy, and the effort to keep it proved a good discipline, and one that strengthened him to meet greater losses, and endure harder self-denials. Two years more went peacefully by ; none but pleasant changes had come to the Millingtons, and on little John—as they still called him—the passing years had left no traces to be regretted. They had only added a few more inches to his height, and touched his mind with the thoughtfulness that marks the time when the young soul bids farewell to childhood, and begins to hear mysterious voices uttering prophecies of its future.

No whisper, or even hint of his true history, ever had reached the boy. He still believed himself the child of his adoptive parents, and although Mrs. Millington often said to her husband, “he will have to know the truth some day,” she agreed with Mr. Millington in not wishing to tell him that truth. They did not believe now that his parentage ever would be ascertained, and it seemed to them a needless cruelty to shadow his young life with its sad mystery.

But it is a mistaken kindness that keeps such knowledge from a child, or that waits until the young soul is thoughtful enough to be deeply wounded by it before imparting it. Bitter truths may be whispered from lip to lip for a long time, before they reach the heart they are destined to bruise, but reach it they surely will some day, and the fate of a life, the destiny even of a soul, may depend upon the way in which those truths are told.

It was the day after Christmas, and a brilliant winter morning. The day before John Millington had celebrated his thirteenth birthday, and with a greater sense of dignity and importance than he ever had known before, he prepared for school that morning, and, with a beaming face, drew on the new rubber boots, fur cap, and warm, red mittens, that had been at once his Christmas and birthday presents.

He felt very old and manly that morning, and he drew himself up proudly, and trudged with cheerful courage through the deep snow to the old school-house, where he was receiving his education.

John was a favorite with his school-mates, and it was seldom that anything occurred to mar the harmony and good-will of their studies and sports. That day, however, the new boots and warm mittens and cap, were the innocent causes of a

quarrel, that changed the face of the world, and shadowed the sunshine of life for John Millington.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, boys," he said gayly to his school-mates, when at twelve o'clock they were dismissed for a nooning of an hour. "Let's make a snow fort, and then we will divide our forces, and one part shall be the British and hold the fort, and the other part shall be the Americans and storm it."

"All right," shouted the boys, and in great glee the fort was begun. It was a bitter day; the icy wind seemed full of needles, and hands, and feet, and ears soon felt as if they were pierced, and tingled and ached with the cold. It was a day when warm clothing was sure to be appreciated, and in his boyish satisfaction, John could not help openly exulting in his own comfortable Christmas gifts.

"Whew!" he said, as he rolled a great ball of snow to its place in the fort, "whew! this weather makes a fellow feel the value of warm mittens and a fur cap, doesn't it?" And he turned with a laughing face to the boy who stood nearest him.

John had no intention of hurting his school-mate's feelings; he had spoken thoughtlessly, out of the overflowing gladness of his heart, but unfortunately the boy to whom he spoke had received no Christmas gifts, and destitute of new

boots, and crimson mittens, and a fur cap himself, he looked with envious eyes on one who possessed them, and felt—as envious natures usually do—very much as if John Millington, since he was so fortunate as to own what his companion did not, had personally wronged him.

“You think you are somebody pretty grand, don’t you now, John Millington?” he said tauntingly, “but it will take more than new boots, and red mittens, and a fur cap to make you anybody worth noticing, I can tell you.”

“They’ll help, though,” John said playfully, and then, prompted by his good-nature, he added, “I wish you had them too, Sam.”

“Save your good wishes for those who’ll thank you for them,” Sam said wrathfully. “I’m better than you are, if I ain’t got such fine clothes, John Millington.”

“O well,” John answered carelessly, “if you think yourself better than I am, Sam, it’s all right, and you ought to be satisfied.”

Sam frowned angrily, and the next minute, as if a new thought had struck him, he exclaimed: “I say, John Millington, the Americans can’t do nothing against the British without a Washington, and now I want to know who’s going to be Washington?”

“Well,” John answered, while he stopped rolling snow and beat his arms vigorously to warm

them, "who shall be? Boys, before we begin war we must play Congress and choose a Washington. Come now, and vote him in."

"First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen," laughed one of the boys. "Johnny, I guess you are more like Washington than any of us, and since you were the one to plan the fort, I think we will let you storm it."

"I guess you wont then," shouted Sam. "I'm going to be an American myself, and I aint going to be led by John Millington, I can tell you."

"Want to be Washington yourself, don't you, Sam Burns?" sneeringly asked the boy who had nominated John.

"It aint no affair of yours what I want," Sam answered, in great anger. "I know what I don't want, and wont have. I wont have John Millington for Washington, and you sha'n't make him Washington."

"He will make a hundred times better Washington than you will, Sam Burns," retorted another of the boys. "He can keep his temper, which is a good deal more than you can do."

"Then let him keep his place, too," fired Sam. "Washington was a gentleman; beggars aint no right to take his place."

"Well, if you want to take it, I'd advise you to stop breaking all the rules in the grammar," replied John's defender.

"It don't make no difference what rules I break," Sam answered defiantly, "there is one thing I wont break, and that's my word, and I tell you, John Millington sha'n't be Washington."

"He shall be, he shall be," shouted a number of the boys.

"No, he sha'n't be," shouted in their turn several of the boys who had placed themselves on Sam's side.

Schoolboys' tempers are usually high, and easily aroused, and for a few minutes, on the snow-covered play-ground, the dispute over the imaginary Washington raged as fiercely as if a serious question, of vital interest to the country, had been under discussion. At first John remained silent, and took no part in the dispute.

"The Congress ought to decide for itself," he said; but soon, as Sam and the boys who followed him grew more vehement in their opposition, all his pride and spirit were aroused, and turning to the division that supported him, he said with great decision:

"Boys, if you want me to lead you when you storm that fort, I'll do it. The British couldn't beat the Americans under Washington, and now I would like to see them beat us."

"You would, would you?" shouted Sam. "Well, if you would like to see them, you'll be gratified, for they'll do it, there's no doubt about

that. Boys that aint got no name, and no family, and don't know who their fathers and mothers are, aint going to beat the great British army, and they had better be careful how they pretend they are Washingtons."

"For shame," called out one of the oldest boys; but Sam was in no mood to heed him.

"I aint got nothin' to be ashamed of," he shouted back. "It's the truth, and he can't deny it. Here, you fine, make-believe Washington"—and the excited boy turned fiercely to John—"you just stand out there, in your fine boots, and mittens, and cap, and tell me who your father is—if you can."

John drew himself up with all his boyish dignity, and looked with flashing eyes at his questioner.

"You just go to Mr. Millington's house, and ask for him, and he will tell you who my father is," he said, with spirit.

"O, he will, will he?" sneered Sam. "If I thought he would, I would go this minute, for it would be a piece of news everybody in Hermitville would give something to know. But he can't tell me, nor you can't, nor anybody else. You aint got no father, and you aint got no name. You aint anybody, and you never will be anybody. You are nothing but a poor foundling Mr. Millington has taken care of out of charity. I

know all about you, for I heard my folks talking last night when they thought I was asleep."

"Well, next time you play listener, I hope you will try to listen to people who are telling the truth," John said, in a voice expressive of great contempt.

"That is just what I did do, last night," Sam retorted. "It was the solemn truth, every word I heard, and you can't deny it. If you can, now is your chance;" and the angry boy planted himself defiantly in front of John.

Not one word of all that Sam had said did John believe; but his heart swelled with indignation that any one should dare to utter such cruel falsehoods—as he thought them—and he straightened his boyish figure, and looked at Sam with an expression of withering scorn.

"You don't deserve the notice of an honest boy, Sam Burns," he said, while his eyes blazed, and his young voice trembled with anger, "and it isn't necessary to deny lies like yours: they'll prove themselves false, without any words from me; but if you will come home with me and ask my mother, she"—

"Your mother!" sneeringly interrupted Sam. "That is a good one! You aint seen your mother, nor has anyone else in Hermitsville, since the day she left you in Mrs. Millington's parlor. Pretty mother she was, wasn't she, now?"

"You lie," trembled on John's lips, but some strange influence kept him from uttering the words.

The play-ground was very quiet now: the boys had gathered in a circle about the two contestants, but they no longer showed any disposition to take part in the dispute. They were all silent, and their young faces looked very serious, as if they felt that this was more than an ordinary quarrel, and one whose consequences would be sorrowful and lasting. With a quick impulse, and a sudden longing for sympathy, John turned and looked at his school-mates. Not one of them spoke, but each boy, as he met John's eyes, looked down and tried to appear unconscious.

"Boys," John shouted fiercely, "boys, if you are my friends, tell Sam Burns that he lies."

Not a boy spoke, or even moved.

Young though he was, John's face grew very pale. The fire in his eyes went out suddenly, and an eager, appealing look succeeded it.

"Boys," he said again, and this time his voice trembled pitifully, "boys, if you are my friends, tell me that you don't believe Sam Burns."

The silence of the play-ground was oppressive. Not a boy spoke, and there was no sound save the voice of the icy wind, that sobbed, as it swept by, as if it sympathized with the young

heart that was learning there the saddest secret of its life. Breathlessly John waited. Slowly the hands of the old clock in the school-house tower marked off the minutes, one—two—three—and still no voice broke that sad silence.

“I don’t believe it,” John shouted then. “Boys”—with one last appeal to his school-mates—“boys, you don’t believe it, do you?”

Some one must speak. The boys all felt that, and one of the oldest of their number stepped now to John’s side, and laid his arm kindly across his shoulders.

“Johnny,” he said gently—while, boy though he was, tears filled his eyes as he spoke—“Johnny, I wouldn’t mind it so much. It isn’t your fault. We are all your friends. Sam”—and he looked unspeakable wrath at that heartless boy—“ought to be whipped for talking so.”

“I only told him the truth,” Sam grumbled, in self-defence.

“Well, what if it was the truth,” thundered back John’s would-be comforter, “were you called upon to publish it? I’ve known it a good while, but I haven’t twitted Johnny with it, because he couldn’t help it, and he isn’t to be blamed for somebody else’s wrong-doing.”

“I don’t see why I shouldn’t tell it,” Sam growled; “he would have to know it some day.”

“Well, I hope you will take pleasure in re-

remembering that you told him," the boy answered severely. "You are welcome to all the honor you will gain from it. None of us will envy you. The most of us have known it for some time, but we have not been mean enough to cast it at poor Johnny. Truth that only hurts and does no good, had better never be told, my mother says."

It was the truth then. Dazed and bewildered as he was, John realized fully now that bitter fact, and with a boy's vivid imagination he instantly magnified every painful feature of the case. He could deny nothing. His home was only his through charity. He had no right to the name he bore. He had no parents—worse than that—his mother had deserted him. Life seemed to have grown, in those few minutes, as cold as the snow-covered ground on which he stood, and as the clock and the teacher's bell summoned the boys to their afternoon tasks, he turned with a despairing cry and ran—not towards his home—but towards the woods that bordered Hermitsville on the north. There, at least, there would be no curious eyes to watch him, and no cruel tongues to whisper of his shame and disgrace.

Young as John was in years, his mind was unusually mature and thoughtful, and he comprehended, far more clearly than many boys of his age would have done, just what his position

was, and his proud, sensitive nature writhed in agony under his mortification and humiliation.

No name, no family, no father, no mother; nothing but a foundling. He heard those cruel words everywhere. The pitiless wind seemed to whisper them as he struggled against it, and tramped desperately on through the dark woods. There did not seem to be any love or any place for him in the cold world. The Millingtons had only cared for him out of charity. He ground his teeth as he remembered those bitter words, and then, suddenly, as he raised his mournful eyes to the blue heavens, the first doubt he had ever known entered his young soul.

Was there a God? If there was, could he wait so peacefully in heaven while such cruel things were done upon his earth? Could he be our Father, when he suffered such bitter wrong to befall the innocent little children who had no power to defend themselves?

There came no answer to those sorrowful doubts, and on and on, with little thought of where he was going or of what might befall him, the wretched boy tramped.

It was just sunset when, in what seemed the heart of the snow-banked forest, he came to a rude hut, built for the shelter of wood-cutters.

A man standing in the low door-way looked curiously at the boy as he approached.

“Halloo,” he called; “’pears to me you’re a small boy to be ploddin’ through this deep snow this time o’ day. What are you doin’ here, hey?”

John was exhausted from his long tramp and almost numb with the cold. “I don’t know what I’m doing,” he said, as he stopped in front of the man.

A peculiar expression crossed the man’s face as he observed the boy more closely. “Don’t you know?” he said dryly. “Then it’s time you found out. Where are you goin,’ hey?”

“Nowhere,” John said drearily.

“To nowhere, be you? Well, I reckon that is a pretty poor place for you or any one to be travelling to. I guess you’d better come in here and warm yourself a spell ’fore you go any further to’ard’ that unknown land.” And the rough-spoken but kind-hearted man laid his strong hand on the boy’s arm, and half led, half dragged him into the hut.

It was a poor, rude place; but a good fire, that was burning in an old stove, gave out a cheerful warmth, and the half-frozen boy dropped down with a sigh of relief on the bench the man offered him.

An old tea-pot was bubbling on the stove, and the man quickly filled a cup from it.

“Drink this,” he said, in a tone of command, and John meekly obeyed. The tea was strong

and hot, and under its stimulating influence he quickly revived.

The man watched him with keen and observing eyes.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"John Mill—" the boy began, and then stopped, arrested by the morbid thought that he had no right to that name.

"Forgot the rest of it, have you?" the man asked, in a peculiar voice. "Well, where do you come from?"

"Hermitville."

"Hermitville! I thought so." And the man nodded, as if settling some question in his own mind. "Aint you Mr. Millington's boy, what they call John?" he asked, in a moment.

"Yes," John answered.

Once more the man nodded, and fastening his eyes on the boy's face, he seemed to study it closely; but several minutes passed before he spoke again.

"Well," he said slowly, when at last he broke the silence, "Hermitville is a pretty smart tramp from here. Be you runnin' away?"

The sharp question stung the boy's conscience. He suddenly remembered the affectionate kindness he had always received in the home, and he now thought of the anxiety he knew they would feel there if he did not soon return.

The man watched him with his sharp eyes. "I see you be," he said, with a reproachful shake of his head. "Well, now, I never heard of any boy, who ran away from his home, who ever did or got much good. What do you s'pose folks in Hermitsville are thinkin' about you now, hey?"

"Oh, I don't know," the forlorn boy fairly sobbed. "I cannot tell you about it, but I am in great trouble."

The man looked at him with a puzzled and somewhat anxious expression on his shrewd face.

"You aint been stealin', have you?" he asked, with some suspicion in his voice.

John's high sense of honor was hurt. "No," he said, with vehemence.

This quick and impetuous tone seemed to convince the wood-cutter. "I don't believe you have," he said; "thieves don't speak like you—nor come from that stock either," he added, in a whisper to himself. "Well," he said again, as he proceeded with his catechism, "you aint done nothin' wrong, nothin' to be ashamed of, have you?"

"No," John said again, without hesitation.

"And yet," the man said seriously, "you are runnin' away from your home, and from them that have always been your best friends. See here, boy, I've lived a good many long years in this world, and sometimes I've found it a pretty

hard place, but I'll tell you this: it aint no use to try to run away from trouble. When it comes to you, you must jest stand and meet it like a man. And if you didn't make it yourself, if you aint done nothin' wrong yourself, you needn't be afraid. There's One above"—and the man glanced reverently upward—"who will help you, and you'll live it down. I know. I've had some experience, and I tell you"—and the man's face looked very mournful, while his voice trembled with feeling—"it is only them who make their own trouble, by their own wrong-doings, who need have any fear of the judgment, either in this world or the next."

John did not answer, and the man was silent for some time; presently he spoke again. "There," he said, "you may sit there till you are pretty well rested, and then you and me will travel back to Hermitsville. I 'spect there has been tears enough shed about you already in this world, and I aint goin' to give no woman a chance to stay awake and cry about you to-night, if I can help it." And, as if he felt relieved by this energetic resolve, the wood-cutter took his tea-pot and proceeded to prepare himself a cup of tea. But even while doing so he still watched the boy closely, and more than once during the next hour, while John slept on the bench, the low words were whispered over him:

“I aint quite sure; it’s hard to get a hold of the truth, but I b’lieve there’s been more crying of nights ’cause of you than there ever ought to have been. I aint sure, and I wont say nothing now; but I’ll find out, and then I’ll do justice.”

The afternoon school had long been over, and Mrs. Millington’s early supper was prepared, and the family gathered around the table, and still John did not return to his home. Growing uneasy at his unusual tardiness, Mr. Millington, as the twilight deepened, went out to seek for him. He had gone but a short distance when he met Sam Burns.

“Have you seen anything of Johnny, Sam?” he asked, expecting to hear of some late snow-ball battle that had detained the scholars.

To his surprise Sam sullenly answered, “No; aint seen nothing of him since noon.”

“Since noon?” Mr. Millington repeated; “why, where has he been since noon?”

“Don’t know,” Sam said defiantly; “walking off the sulks, I guess.”

Something evidently was wrong, and Mr. Millington was not a man to waste his words.

“What do you mean, Sam Burns?” he said, in a stern voice, as he grasped the boy by his coat-collar. “Tell me the truth at once, or I will make you tell it. Where is John, and what is the matter with him?”

Thoroughly frightened, Sam whimpered out the truth.

"He got mad, Mr. Millington, because—because—I told him the truth."

"You told him the truth. What truth?" demanded Mr. Millington.

"Nothing—only—that he wasn't your boy, nor nobody's boy," Sam, in a voice at once reluctant and defiant, confessed.

"You—dog!" Mr. Millington said, in the heat of his stern indignation, and the stout cane he carried fell with no gentle force on Sam's cringing shoulders. "You have done a mean and cruel thing, that no boy with a heart could have done," he said severely; "and now, if you are satisfied with your good day's work, and do not want to be responsible for Johnny's death, go and ask your father to come and help me look for him."

Several hours later a company of men, who were searching the forest for the missing boy, met the wood-cutter leading him home.

"Be you lookin' for this youngster?" the man inquired. "Well, here he is. I've done what I could to keep him in this world a spell longer, and now I reckon the doctor will have to see what he can do. But, look here, boy," and the wood-cutter took John's hand and held it in his own as he spoke, "no matter what your trouble

is, don't you ever try to run away from it. You stay right here, where you can be found when you are wanted, and you jest do your duty and bear your trouble like a man, and then maybe it will prove a blessing to you yet." And with another hard pressure of the boy's hand, the man, who seemed strangely agitated, resigned him to the care of his friends.

Quickly as they could, they carried him home ; but many days passed before he could tell his story, or even listen to the consoling words of those who tenderly watched him. Pneumonia, with its burning fever and racking cough, followed the exposure of that trying day, and for weeks the young life, that had been so cruelly wounded, seemed just within the grasp of the strong angel who guards the darkened way that leads home to the Father's house.

But, though the shadow had fallen upon his life, his work was still undone, and slowly but surely the tide on which he had been drifting heavenward retreated, and left him still in this world, in which, if for him—as for all—there was much to be suffered and endured, there was also much to be learned, and much work that would bring its own precious reward with it, for him to do for his brothers upon earth, and for his Father in heaven.

CHAPTER VI.

RESOLUTIONS.

“Belief, or unbelief,
Bears upon life, determines its whole course,
Begins at its beginning.”—*Robert Browning.*

IT was the last of December when John was taken ill, but before his health was fully restored it was early spring, and in the blue of the sky, the warmth of the wind, and the ripple of waters that had long been ice-bound, one could read the glad assurance that the time of the singing of birds had fully come.

Everything in nature was happy and contented with its lot, and even the discontented faces of repining men and women looked brighter and more hopeful; but John Millington, though now perfectly well and able to perform all his tasks at home and in school, seemed greatly changed. He brooded constantly now over the mystery of his parentage; the bitter knowledge that he had been deserted made him feel disgraced; even the kindness of his adoptive parents could not cause him to forget that he was the recipient of their charity, and the humiliating consciousness that he was a

nameless boy, at whom the neighbors looked with compassionate wonder, and of whom they talked in curious whispers, threatened to mar his naturally genial and affectionate disposition, and make him morbid, reserved, and suspicious.

All that could be told him of his history Mrs. Millington, with a mother's kindness, had told him. She had described his own mother to him as clearly as she could, and she had shown him the little garments and the necklace that through all the years she had carefully preserved. With eager eyes the poor boy had examined them, vainly hoping to find some mark that might give him at least a clue to his name, but his search was fruitless. The necklace especially had interested him. There, at least, was something that hinted of his family and name, but the hint was too vague to be understood, and with a feeling of despair he replaced the mementos of his infancy in the box and consigned them once more to Mrs. Millington's care.

In the long weeks of sickness through which he had passed John had matured rapidly. The careless freedom of a thoughtless, light-hearted boy was gone from him forever, and, sadder still, it seemed as if the innocent child-faith, that believes in goodness because it has no knowledge of evil, was likewise lost.

“Tis simple that betrayal by mother's love
Should bring despair of God's, too.”

And the more, in those first bitter days, the poor boy thought about his mother, the weaker grew his confidence in the heavenly Father, in whom he had been taught implicitly to believe.

Many thoughts and many plans passed in those days through his mind. What should he do? Where should he go? What should he be? Every night, when he went to bed, he pondered on those questions, and every morning, when he arose, they started up anew to harass and puzzle him. With the affectionate anxiety of a father, Mr. Millington watched the boy. Something must be done and done quickly if he were not to become a gloomy, morose creature, and Mr. Millington, with his sound, practical common-sense, soon decided what course to pursue.

"There is nothing like work for curing the heart-ache," he said wisely to his wife. "When the hands are filled with work that must be done, the mind is forced to attend to that alone, and it has no time to think of troublesome and unanswerable questions; and sometimes, to have no leisure for thinking is the greatest blessing a sad heart can have. My mind is made up. I am going to take John from school and apprentice him to William."

"He won't like it," Mrs. Millington said, with much positiveness.

"I don't expect him to like it. In this contrary

world we are pretty apt not to like what is good for us. I learned that long ago. And so I shall not ask the boy to like it. I shall simply tell him to do it because it is his duty."

"I am sorry," Mrs. Millington said gently, "that duty should be made the hard thing I know that will seem to him."

"It wont hurt him," Mr. Millington replied, with confidence. "Duty very seldom comes to us in the shape of pleasure excursions, and if John is to do a man's work in this world he must not be fed on sugar-plums. Regular hours and steady employment are just what he wants at present. Whether a man is a prince or a peasant, it cannot hurt him to know how to drive a nail straight, and handle a saw and a plane. There is nothing like having a useful work to do, and doing it faithfully, to give one a feeling of self-respect; and self-respect is just what John is in danger of losing now, because he is constantly thinking of himself as a nobody."

"Very well," Mrs. Millington answered, in accordance with her life-long custom; "I believe you know best, father."

"I am sure I do," Mr. Millington replied, in his usual positive manner: and, in fulfilment of his plans, a day or two more saw John in his adopted brother William's shop, and occupied from morning until night with boards and tools.

It was honest and clean work, that, though it might roughen the hands, left no stain upon the conscience; and though—as Mrs. Millington had foreseen—the boy did not like it, it was a good discipline for him, and his strong sense of duty made him faithful and obedient. At first he was little more than an errand-boy in the busy shop, and subject to the orders of all the workmen, but good lessons in humility were thus taught him, and it did him no harm to come in close contact with energetic working-men, many of them full of original ideas and quaint forms of expression, and all of them strongly impressed with the importance of faithfulness in the smallest details of their work, if they would have that work permanent and abiding.

The spring passed, and summer with its dreamy days, in which it is sweet to do nothing, succeeded, and still John labored in the cabinet-shop. Late one afternoon he was collecting and sorting the pieces of wood with which the floor of the shop was strewn, when William Millington, as he was passing by, stopped to speak to him.

“Don’t like this work much, do you, Johnny?” he said kindly.

The boy simply shook his head, as if he thought a verbal assertion of such a self-evident fact as his dislike of his task unnecessary, and went on sorting the bits of lumber.

William watched him with keen and thoughtful eyes for a few moments.

“It wont hurt you, Johnny, even if you do not like it,” he said soon. “It is a good lesson to learn how to choose the valuable and reject the worthless, no matter in what school you are taught it. See here; that is hard wood”—and William picked up a narrow strip of black walnut John had thrown aside—“save that; it will come in use for picture-mouldings if for nothing else. But you needn’t save that,” he continued, as John laid a piece of pine wood on the pile to be preserved; “it is split and warped; no man with a conscience would use that in work he wished considered first-rate.”

John looked admiringly at William. “I wish I could see the use and uselessness of these pieces as plainly as you do,” he said; “I wouldn’t mind sorting them then.”

“Perhaps then you would be fit for better work,” William answered. “You see you want to be at the top, without the trouble of climbing, Johnny. It is natural, I suppose, to feel so, but it is not natural for any one to do great things well, who has not first worked patiently with small ones. No matter whether you are in a college or a carpenter’s shop, there is no royal way to the top. The ladder always stands upon the ground, and if you mean to climb it you must

begin at the bottom, and go up round by round."

"That's true," John said, "and I'm willing to climb, but—" he added, almost in a whisper, "I would like the privilege of choosing my own ladder."

William had turned to go, but he caught the low words and came back to the boy.

"If you had that privilege, what ladder would you choose, John?" he asked kindly.

"I would choose one on which I could make a name for myself, since I don't possess one now," John answered quickly.

"'Good and faithful servant' is about the best name any man can have—we will all know that some day—" William said, in a sober voice; "and you can gain that name, Johnny, by working with tools, as well as with books. But don't despair, lad; if your feet are meant to climb another ladder than the one set for them here, there is no fear but they'll find it, though—" and William's tone told of disappointment—"I did hope to keep you with me here in the shop, John."

"I will stay with you, if you really need me," John answered gratefully.

William nodded; but, saying to himself, "I want no sacrifice," he left the boy, and that evening called on Mr. Crosby.

Soon after Mr. Crosby came into the shop.

“John,” he said, as the boy, intent on his work, with a respectful bow was hurrying by him, “John, I am going fishing this morning, and your brother says, if you like, you may have a holiday. Will you take it, and go with me?”

John’s pale face flushed with pleasure. The prospect of escaping from that hot shop, with its incessant click of tools, and whir of machinery, and going off for a long day in the woods, was indeed delightful.

“I thought you would like to go, John,” Mr. Crosby said, with a smile, as he rightly interpreted the boy’s expression, “and so I brought lunch-basket, and lines, and hooks with me, and we can start at once, if you are ready.”

“We cannot start too soon for me, sir,” John answered eagerly, and soon he and Mr. Crosby had left Hermitsville behind them, and climbed one of the low, green hills that sheltered the little village on the west.

They stopped at last on the brink of a crystal brook, that laughed and babbled as it caught the sunshine and rippled over the stones, and sent its tiny rills down to the roots of the whispering ferns, and multitudinous green things that grew in glad profusion on its borders.

“Here is just the spot for trout, John,” Mr. Crosby said, as he prepared his own line and showed the boy how to manage his.

Two or three fruitless but pleasant hours were spent in trolling for trout that, though they ever and anon splashed gayly in the clear water, were all too wary to be caught, and then the lunch-basket was opened and Mr. Crosby and John sat down on a green knoll to enjoy its contents.

“How wonderful God’s works are,” Mr. Crosby said, as his eyes turned with reverent and loving interest from one to another of the beautiful objects around them. “John, do you know anything of the natural sciences?”

“No, Mr. Crosby,” John answered humbly.

“You have a wonderful world before you then, to investigate and become acquainted with. Philosophy, chemistry, botany, astronomy, and geology—you will be glad to know something about them, I am sure, John.”

“Yes,” John answered, “I would be glad to know something about everything, Mr. Crosby;” and then, as if the words must be spoken, he exclaimed quickly, “but, first of all, I want to know something about myself, Mr. Crosby.”

“I can tell you that you are a strong, healthy boy, with a life before you that will be very much what you will to make it,” Mr. Crosby said, as he watched the boy. “What more do you want to know, John?”

“This”—and now the words came with impetuous earnestness—“I want to know who I am,

Mr. Crosby, and what my name is. It is dreadful not to have a right even to a name." And the boy's voice trembled as he spoke.

"Yes, but there is something still more dreadful, my boy, and that is, to have a right to a good and honorable name and then disgrace it."

"I would never disgrace mine if I knew it," John said proudly.

"Ah, yes, my boy, so we all say in our early youth, before we have struggled with the world and encountered its terrible temptations," Mr. Crosby answered gravely. "There is a time, in every boy's life, I believe, when he feels as self-confident as Phaeton, and thinks, like him, that he can drive the chariot of the sun unerringly; but when the stern tests are applied, when trials and temptations come, to prove what manner of men we are, how few come out of their conflicts conquerors. What multitudes meet such irretrievable defeat and ruin, that with mournful hearts we say, Good had it been for them if they had never been born. My boy," and Mr. Crosby's tone awed and subdued John, "believe me. Nothing but the firmest Christian principle can triumphantly resist the temptations of life. Only the Christian, who is clad in the armor of God, in the hours of fiery trial, having done all, can stand. Are you a Christian, John?"

"I—I don't know, Mr. Crosby," the boy an-

swered humbly. "I am not sure I know what a Christian is."

"A Christian," Mr. Crosby gently answered, "is one whose highest ambition is to do his Master's will; who asks no nobler name than 'servant of God;' and who seeks no greater honor than to be owned and known by Christ. Do those words describe you, John?"

Slowly and sadly the boy shook his head.

"I wish they did, Mr. Crosby," he faltered. "I feel that it would be grand to be such a Christian, but, oh, I cannot help it"—and John's voice choked as he spoke. "I do want something else, Mr. Crosby. I want the place among men that only an honorable name can give me. I want to know who my parents were; I want to know the family I belong to; and until I do know all that, I never"—and in his earnestness the boy clinched his hand and beat the ground—"can be satisfied."

A moisture dimmed Mr. Crosby's eyes while he listened to the earnest boy. Himself the noble descendent of a long line of honorable Christian ancestors, and prizing that ancestry as his richest earthly inheritance, he could well sympathize with John's intense desire to know his family and his name. But he would not hold out to the boy any false hopes: he did not believe that the shadow under which he was groping would ever be lifted, and he felt that he was called upon—not to en-

courage dreams that could never be realized—but to nerve the young soul with courage to bear its cross, and to gird the boy with the armor in which alone he could endure successfully the conflicts of his life; and so he answered him in words that were tender, but at the same time strong and true.

“Noble names, if nobly borne, are indeed an inheritance to be prized, John; and it is a proud satisfaction to be able to point to an upright, honorable, Christian man and say: he is my father. But if God, in his loving plans for you, withholds that inheritance and that satisfaction, will you not consent that his will should be done? Will you not with that will try to be content? Look up, my boy. There is a precious promise: ‘I will be his father, and he shall be my son.’ When you have claimed that promise, John, you will know—as until you do claim it you never can know—what it is to be truly ennobled.”

“I wish I could claim it,” John humbly confessed. “But”—he asked anxiously, in a moment—“Mr. Crosby, don’t you believe, really, that I will find my own parents and know my own name some day?”

It was a hard question to be asked. John waited, with a look on his young face that, as the minister rightly felt, told at once what confidence he had in his opinion, and how much he trusted that it would give him encouragement.

It was one of life's critical moments, and Mr. Crosby well understood that it was. Would his answer help to inspire the boy with a high ambition to triumph over all that was adverse in his lot, and, with God's help, live his life nobly and make it a blessing to the world and to himself? or would it only crush him, and tend to make him hopeless, bitter, and unbelieving?

For a few moments Mr. Crosby thought and prayed, and then he said gravely: "I wish I could believe as you wish me to believe, John, but I can find no warrant for such a pleasant faith. It is now more than thirteen years since you were left at Mr. Millington's. That is a long time, and"—and Mr. Crosby's voice trembled, though he was making a great effort to be calm and even matter-of-fact in his statement—"and since, through all these years, not one word has been heard from any one interested in you, I dare not indulge any hope that anything more than we know to-day ever will be heard or known concerning you."

While slowly and deliberately Mr. Crosby uttered these words, John listened as if his fate for life were being decided, and when Mr. Crosby ceased, and the hope the boy had so long clung to was crushed, he threw himself prostrate on the ground and with a bitter cry groaned: "I wish I had never been born."

"Hush; life's possibilities are too precious for

you to despise them," Mr. Crosby said, as he bent over the boy and laid his hand tenderly on his head.

"Nothing is possible for me but disgrace," John said bitterly. "I shall always be a nobody."

"Then, if you are, it will be entirely your own fault," Mr. Crosby said, with firmness.

"There is nothing I can do to help it," the boy murmured rebelliously.

"Nothing? there is everything for you to do," Mr. Crosby answered, in a decided and almost stern voice. "You are young and strong, you have a good mind; the world is wide, and it is full of grand opportunities. If an honorable family name is a desirable inheritance, a noble personal character is a far more enviable possession. You can have the last if you will, John. Will you?"

There was a long, deep silence. Merrily the little brook rippled and sung, as it danced onward towards the fathomless sea: joyously the bright-winged wood-birds carolled as they soared upward to the sky, and silently Mr. Crosby prayed to the Father, who, while all nature was offering glad worship, was watching with infinite compassion the struggles of a human heart.

Presently John looked up. A proud light shone in his dark eyes, and his voice was firm and clear.

"I will," he promised solemnly.

Mr. Crosby took the boy's hand and held it fast.

"In whose strength, John?" he asked searchingly.

The bright eyes fell; once more the shadow flitted across the young face. Silently, for awhile, Mr. Crosby watched and studied that downcast face, and then he slowly repeated:

"'He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for'"—with a tender but firm emphasis on the last words—" 'for without me ye can do—nothing.' "

The sacred words trembled on the sweet, still air, and the boy trembled as he heard them.

"I am afraid," he whispered; "that abiding—it will be so hard. Pray for me, Mr. Crosby."

Side by side they knelt: the man of middle-age, who for years had known the safe shelter of his Saviour's love, and the boy, still standing on life's threshold, whose heart was yearning for that shelter, and up to the throne of him who waits to be gracious went the humble prayer:

"Our Father, who gives us life, and plans its course, who knows our needs, and hears our feeblest cries, hear this young soul, that in its pain and loneliness to-day is crying out for thee.

"Come very close, our Father, to this thy child. Help him to trust, though to-day he cannot understand the need-be of thy dealings with him. Help him to look up to thee, and with a child's faith

say, lovingly, My Father. Write upon him thy new name. Help him to feel the preciousness of a son-ship that can claim thee for Father, Christ for an elder brother, and the Holy Ghost for comforter: then help him to aim, as his highest ambition, to be worthy of the honor of such precious relationships.

“May he consecrate himself to thee, our Father. May he love the will, and do the work of Christ. May he bear his cross with a submissive, but brave heart now, and so live and work, doing both nobly, because humbly, that in the glad hereafter, in return for loving service here, thou canst give unto him an immortal crown. In the name, and for the sake of him who loved us and gave himself for us, we ask these mercies.”

The low “Amen” was spoken, and died away, and still John did not stir. Presently Mr. Crosby moved as if to rise, but the boy’s hand sought his and detained him.

“In the name, and for the sake of him who loved *me*, and gave himself for me,” he solemnly promised, “I will be a Christian.”

CHAPTER VII.

PLANS.

“And there’s no life so lone and low,
But strength divine is given
From narrowest lot on earth to grow
The straighter up to heaven.”—*Gerald Massey.*

TWO or three weeks went by and left John still working in the cabinet-shop ; but there was a bright light in his face and a spring in his step now, that bore witness to the change that had passed over his heart.

Converted—turned from a selfish, repining, rebellious struggle against the will of his Father in heaven, to a prayerful desire to be lovingly, loyally submissive to that will—that was the change that had come over John. He might make many mistakes and meet with many temptations, and even defeats, in his efforts to be conformed to that will, but after each defeat he would rise again with a stronger and firmer determination to press forward.

To be a Christian—to so live that he would be worthy to bear his Master’s name—that was John’s ambition now : and, as he cherished it, the old dis-

content melted away, and the old wound slowly, but surely, healed.

He knew nothing of the long conversations, of which he was the subject, that Mr. Crosby and Mr. Millington and his son William were having in those days, and he would have been greatly surprised if he had heard Mr. Crosby's last words to his adoptive father, at the close of a conversation in which several matters had been positively decided.

"It may not be safe or right always for us, poor blind gropers among time's shadows, as we are, to try to read the meaning of many of God's dealings with us, or explain his providences," the minister said reverently. "If it is a good thing to have knowledge of God, it is a grander thing to repose confidence in him, and so I dare not presume to-day—any more than thirteen years ago, when you first asked it, Mr. Millington—to answer your question, and say why God permitted that child to be deserted. We must wait for the full shining of 'the light that shows all things in the slow history of their ripening,' before we can hope to understand the mystery. But, as I have watched and studied the boy, my faith in the great law of compensation has been wonderfully strengthened. With his intense, inborn love for family and old family names, he might, if he possessed such an one, de-

pend upon it too much ; might, in fact, make it—as so many well-born men do—a crutch, and lean upon it for support, instead of aiming—as such men ought—to make it still stronger and more influential. But if—as under the circumstances seems more probable—his name is a disgraced one, then, if he knew it, he would suffer far more than he does now. No ; God’s providence may be full of mysteries, but they are mysteries that faith—though she cannot explain them—knows to be bright with love. Now, John must make a name for himself ; the place he fills in the world will depend entirely upon his own worthiness ; and ten or fifteen years from now, it may be for us all a cause of thanksgiving that this boy had, in early life, to endure the discipline for which we pity him so much to-day.”

“ You are a good comforter, Mr. Crosby, and I hope you will prove a true prophet,” William Millington answered. And as he rose to leave, he said : “ I will send John to you this evening, and you can explain our plans to him, if you will be so kind.”

“ Very well,” the minister replied, and that evening brought John to his study.

“ William said you wanted to see me, sir,” the boy said modestly, as Mr. Crosby laid aside his book and gave him a cordial welcome.

“ And William was quite right. Sit down, my

boy, I do want to see you. I want to have a serious talk with you. What have you been doing since the day we went fishing?"

"Working, as usual, in the shop," John answered. "And," he added, after a moment's hesitation, "I have been reading my Bible, Mr. Crosby, and trying to be a Christian."

"Well?" the minister said interrogatively, as John's expression told that he had not said all that was in his mind.

"I am afraid it is not well, at least not very well, sir," the boy truthfully confessed. "Sometimes the harder I try to do right, the easier it seems for me to do wrong. I feel as if I were climbing a steep hill all the while, Mr. Crosby."

"Yes," Mr. Crosby said, in a voice full of sympathy and comprehension, "I understand. I have been just where you are now, John, but at last I learned that I never could climb that hill myself, and then I ceased to trust in my own strength, but gave myself to Christ and let him carry me."

"I don't know how to do that," John said frankly; "it seems as if I must make and keep myself good, Mr. Crosby."

"And yet you feel that you succeed very poorly, do you?" Mr. Crosby asked gently. "Yes, I know all about that labor of Hercules. My boy," he continued, as John looked at him with a face that

seemed to be asking for help, "when we undertake to kill the Goliaths that meet us in our lives, we should take care to arm ourselves with David's sling and stones. But keep on trying, my boy, and, better still, keep on praying; and through prayer you will learn day by day to love your Saviour more devotedly, and trust him more entirely."

There was a little pause after Mr. Crosby's last words. John sat with downcast eyes, apparently studying the pattern of the carpet, while Mr. Crosby's thoughtful eyes studied him.

"John," Mr. Crosby asked soon, "have you ever formed any plans for your future? Have you ever thought of what you would like to do and be when you become a man?"

The boy's sober face brightened, and his frank, truthful eyes were raised quickly to the kind face that was watching him.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I have often thought of what I would like to do, but," and the sober look returned, "but, Mr. Crosby, it isn't much use, is it, to plan a house if you haven't money nor materials to build it with?"

The minister smiled. "Just what does that question mean, John?" he asked kindly.

John thought a moment, and then he said: "I suppose it means, Mr. Crosby, that, since I must work in the shop, it isn't any use for me to think

what I would like to do somewhere else. God puts us just where he wants us, doesn't he, sir? and if I am a Christian, I must be contented with the place he gives me. Mustn't I?" and John waited anxiously for the minister's answer.

It was a very old, and yet an ever new question that John had asked, and it was one that seldom fails to present itself to earnest natures at the beginning of their Christian course.

"Yes, my boy," Mr. Crosby said soon, "you are quite right. If you are a Christian, you will be content with your Master's will; you will be not only willing, but happy to live and labor where he places you. But, at the same time—" and Mr. Crosby's voice was very emphatic now—"if you are a Christian, John, you will never forget that your Master's will for you is that you should 'go on unto perfection:' and if you are a Christian, you will never—no matter what your lot in life may be—feel that you may rest from further effort, or cease from earnest endeavors to go up higher."

Mr. Crosby paused here, but though John did not speak, his face still denoted perplexity, and after a moment's thought the minister continued:

"Our life is much like a graded school, my boy. What would you think of the scholar who, having been assigned a place in one of the lowest classrooms, should sit down contentedly at his desk,

saying, Well, this is my place ; the Master has put me here, and now I must be contented ; and should fold his hands and indulge no desire, and make no faithful, resolute effort to prepare for and gain promotion into a higher class ? Would you not think that he had sadly mistaken the will of his Master, who, while wishing him to be happy and contented in that lower grade, only meant that he should use it as a stepping-stone, and make in it good preparation for a higher department ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” John said, with great decision, as Mr. Crosby waited for an answer to his question.

“ I know you would. Well, my boy, now think of yourself as a Christian, instead of as a school-boy. Make your own application, and tell me if it does not throw a little light on the problem you asked me to solve.”

The boy’s thoughtful face grew very serious, and several moments went by before he again raised his clear eyes and looked at the minister. Presently, however, his perplexed expression changed ; his eyes brightened, and he left his chair and in his earnestness came close to Mr. Crosby’s side.

“ Mr. Crosby,” he said, and his young voice was at once modest and decided, “ I think the light is pretty clear, and it has helped me to see this : if God has given me a low place now, I ought, if I am a Christian, to try to make of it a

ladder by which I can go up higher, somewhere where I can do better work for him and make myself a better and more useful man. While I stay here I ought to be contented, and cheerful, and faithful to every duty, but at the same time it is right for me to look up to the top of the ladder, and try with all my strength to climb there. Isn't it, sir?"

"Yes," Mr. Crosby said, with emphasis; "it is your right, your privilege, and your imperative duty, as a Christian, in a world where there is so much work to be done for Christ, to make yourself just as complete a man as you can. Do you know what complete means, John?"

John hesitated. "Isn't a thing complete when it is done, sir?" he asked rather doubtfully.

"Not always, I am afraid," Mr. Crosby said, with a half sigh. "A great deal depends upon the way in which the thing is done. Listen, John"—and Mr. Crosby turned to his favorite Webster—"Complete: to bring to a state in which there is no deficiency.' There is your life-work marked out for you, my boy," the good man said, with tender seriousness. "Never, for Christ's sake, allow yourself to be satisfied with anything less in your character, your education, or your work, than completion."

The face with which John was watching Mr. Crosby was at once reverent and full of questions.

“Wont I—wont I be pretty sure to be discontented if I try to be anything as grand as that?” he asked slowly.

Mr. Crosby smiled. “Yes, with yourself,” he answered. “I do not promise that you shall ever be content with John Millington. But day by day, as you ‘study to show thyself approved unto God,’ your content in Christ will deepen; and the more fully you trust in him, the more entirely he will ‘perfect that which concerneth you.’”

John made no reply, but the minister’s faithful words had fallen like good seed into good ground, and fruit unto perfection would one day be brought forth to enable him to rejoice, even now, in the spring-time, over the autumn’s harvest; and with a feeling of thanksgiving that to him was granted the privilege of guiding the young soul standing now on life’s threshold, he asked soon:

“John, if you could make plans for yourself, and carry them out, what would you like now to do?”

There was no hesitation in John’s answer. He had evidently considered that question well, and he said at once:

“I would like to go away from Hermitsville.”

“Away from your best friends, John?”

The boy choked back something like a sob, but he answered firmly:

“I am willing to stay here if I ought, Mr.

Crosby, but I would like to go away where nobody knows about me. I'd like to have a chance to make more of myself, Mr. Crosby."

Mr. Crosby looked at the young boy, who felt already so heavily weighted with the burden of life, and answered kindly :

"A chance to make more of yourself than you can here in Hermitsville, do you mean, John? Well, if I tell you that you shall have that chance, will you tell me what you will do with it?"

"I will make myself a man," the boy said, with a sudden fire in his eyes.

"I believe you will," Mr. Crosby thought, but he only said :

"You have a great many steps to take yet before you reach manhood, but your steps in the present may and probably will decide your place in the future. Where do you want to go, John? What do you want to do?"

"I want to go to school ; I want to study," John answered, with prompt decision.

Mr. Crosby nodded, "So I expected," he said quietly. "But, my boy, it is difficult and well-nigh impossible to walk in learning's paths without money : and so, before we go any farther, we must answer this question : where is the money to come from?"

John's bright face sobered instantly. "It will come from nowhere ; I know that, Mr. Crosby,"

he said sadly, "only—" and he looked wishfully to his kind friend—"sometimes I have thought that maybe I could work : couldn't I work, Mr. Crosby, and help myself in that way through school?"

"Yes, you could, if you would," Mr. Crosby said slowly, "but—stop," he ordered, as he saw John's quick motion to speak, "listen to me first. Before we decide on this step you must consider it well and count the cost. I know a school, one of the best in New England, where I can send you." John's face grew fairly radiant as he heard these words, but, still enforcing silence, Mr. Crosby went slowly on.

"You can go there on these conditions, John : Mr. Millington will continue to clothe you in good strong, sensible clothes, the same in fashion and material as you have always had. And now, while these clothes will be good enough for all necessary purposes, you must understand that you will probably be the plainest and poorest-dressed boy in that school ; for your schoolmates will all be richer than you are, and of course their dress will show that they are. Could you bear to see that difference, John, and know that the advantage in looks was all on their side?"

John pressed his lips firmly together for an instant, and then he said :

"I think I could, Mr. Crosby. I could try to think about my work and not about my clothes."

“Very well ; it will require a courage greater than many soldiers possess ; but still, we will consider this point settled : you are willing to wear plain, and even patched clothes and shoes if necessary ? I may tell Mr. Millington so ?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now, another thing : you will have no spending-money, John. Have you resolution enough cheerfully to do without it ? Can you bear to be denied a great many pleasant things you will see your classmates enjoying ?”

“I have never had spending-money, sir.”

“True, but neither have you ever felt the want of it, as you often will in that school. Well, John, when you learn, as you soon will there, what a power, in many ways, money is, can you, for the sake of acquiring an education, bear to carry an empty purse, or maybe no purse, at all ?”

“I think I can, Mr. Crosby.”

Mr. Crosby nodded his approbation. “Now,” and he fastened his eyes searchingly on John, “now for the third point. Board is a very important item in a student’s life, John. Unless the body is well nourished, the delicate brain will suffer, and therefore, before you enter the school-room, we must provide you a home. Board in the school would be expensive, but I have a friend—one of the professors—who in return for what you can do for him will give you bread and butter.”

“What can I do for him?” John asked, in surprise.

“Various things: you can attend to his fires, blacken his boots, groom and harness his horse, dig paths in the snow in winter, and work in his garden in the spring and summer. There is enough that you can do for him, my boy, but the important question is, are you humble enough to do it? Can you bear to fill a servant’s place, John, in a home where your classmates are received as gentlemen?”

John opened and closed his lips several times before he spoke.

“It will be hard, Mr. Crosby,” he said, with a long-drawn breath, “but—but I think—if I pray, I’ll be able to do it.”

“I think you will,” Mr. Crosby said encouragingly, “and when you find it hardest, remember, my boy, that he who cannot serve patiently will never be fit to rule nobly. Now, there are only two things more to settle—your books and tuition. The text-books, Professor Selwyn has kindly offered to furnish you with. They will be old, second-hand books, that other students have used, and they will cost him little or nothing. For your tuition, it is proposed that you ring the school-bells. They ring at least every hour, and you will need to be very prompt. A dilatory, unreliable boy can never retain that office; and

then you will also have charge of the school post-office. They have two mails a day; you will carry and bring those mails from the town office, and distribute the letters in the students' boxes. That will be a very responsible duty. Letters with money will very often pass through your hands. Can you promise me to be faithful to that trust? To never for an instant tamper with what is not your own?"

John looked at Mr. Crosby with eyes that were singularly frank and honest.

"I don't think I'd ever want to," he said simply.

"I believe you," Mr. Crosby said. "Well, my boy, we have counted the cost of this important step now, and we have found, have we not, that you have the money to pay for it?"

"Money," John exclaimed.

"What in your case will be accepted as an equivalent for money?" Mr. Crosby explained, with a smile. "Let us see: resolution and moral courage enough to own poverty and not be ashamed of it; humility to take a servant's place and not feel disgraced; faithfulness in performing duties that will often prove irksome; unswerving honesty in caring for the possessions of others. John, if I give you such a character, can you solemnly promise to be worthy of it?"

"I will pray to be," John said humbly.

Mr. Crosby laid his hand in tender blessing on the boy's young head.

"Only the years, with their searching tests, can prove what you will be," he said, "but, my boy, if you keep your promise, and, through the strength that prayer alone can give, resist and overcome all temptations to moral cowardice, pride, unfaithfulness and dishonesty, the angels will call you a rich and a great man, though your place in the world's view should always be one of poverty and servitude."

"I will do my very best, sir," John once more earnestly promised.

"I hope and expect you will. And your actions will soon prove your sincerity, John, for day after to-morrow you will start with me for Hancock."

John left Mr. Crosby and walked home that evening feeling, perhaps, more like a Columbus on the verge of discovering a new world than he would ever feel again. Such wonderful possibilities seemed opening before him, and so much, that he had scarcely dared to dream of, was promised him now, that he could hardly believe he was the same boy who only a few hours before had swept up the shavings in his brother's shop, with no prospect, as he then supposed, of any change in his work for months, it might be years, to come.

It was with a happy heart that he fell asleep that night, and though the next day the fact that he was to leave his home and friends for a long time, and would probably never return to take up his old life with them, sobered him a little, still, even while he clung to what he was parting from, his young and hopeful heart could not help looking forward with glad imaginations to what the unknown future was hiding from him.

He had a last visit to make to his brother's shop the day before he left Hermitsville; and as he was hurrying home from there a strange voice suddenly called:

"Hallo, youngster, you aint forgot an old friend, have you?" And looking back, John saw the wood-cutter coming after him.

With a pleased smile, the boy stepped back and joined the man. "I am glad to see you," he said frankly.

The wood-cutter's grim face softened. "Be you," he said. "Well, it sounds pleasant to hear that. I'm 'fraid there aint many, now, who would say it. What are you doin' now?" he asked, in a moment, after his keen eyes had closely inspected the boy. "You aint been runnin' away agin, since I saw you, have you?"

John laughed. "No," he said, "but I'm going away to-morrow. I am going to school."

“Be you?” and the wood-cutter’s tone denoted surprise, and a little doubt whether to be pleased or annoyed. He walked on for several moments without speaking, and then he drew a long breath, as if he at last had decided some question that was troubling him.

“Well,” he said slowly, “nothing’s certain, an’ I s’pose it will be a good thing for you to go to school. I never went much to no school, myself. Maybe if I had gone more it would have been better for me. It’s very strange,” he continued, in a slow, ruminating tone, “what there is in the learnin’ that’s kept between the two covers of a book, that it can make the men that knows it so much better off than the men that doesn’t know it. I don’t understand it; but I know it’s so, an’ so, boy, I hope you’ll make good use of that chance now, wont you?” And he looked sharply, and even anxiously, at John.

“Yes, I will try to do so,” John promised.

The man nodded his head approvingly. “Them that tries is the ones that do,” he said wisely. “Aw,” he added, in a moment, “its all uncertain; it seems a hard thing to do justice, things ain’t very plain, but a great deal may depend upon the way you try. I don’t want folks ever to be ashamed of you.”

John looked up at him in innocent surprise. “I hope they never will be,” he said simply.

“We’ll see, we’ll see,” the man said, in a quick, nervous voice. “Look here, boy,” he said, soon as they came to a turn in the street, “I’m goin’ down here; your way an’ mine don’t run together no longer. But now, you mind my words. Don’t you do nothin’ wrong, nothin’ to bring trouble on yourself, and make them you b’long to ’shamed of you, an’ then, if trouble comes, an’ I ’spect it will, for it most generally don’t let nobody escape it, you just stand an’ face it like a man. And wherever you goes, you be sure and let folks in Hermitsville know all about you. There’s enough, now, that stands in the way of justice; don’t you ever do nothin’ to keep it from being done. Will you, now?” and in his earnestness the man grasped the boy’s arm and pressed it hard.

It was impossible for John to imagine what the man meant, and he began to wonder if he was not insane, but he answered promptly:

“No. I’ll never hinder justice, if I can help it.”

“Don’t you run away, then,” the man said nervously, while he fumbled for something in his pocket. “I’ve got something for you,” he whispered now; it aint money, an’ it aint books, but, maybe, if you take care of it, it will do for you what money and books can’t;” and drawing out a small parcel, wrapped in paper that looked worn and colored with years, he placed it in the boy’s hands.

“You keep that,” he said solemnly. “It

wont take up much room, but maybe you'll find it a help in this world, where justice is such a slow, hard thing to get done." And grasping the boy's hand, the man gave it an almost convulsive squeeze, then dropped it, turned the corner, and quickly disappeared.

Full of curiosity, John carried the mysterious package home and gave it to Mrs. Millington.

"Open it please, mother," he said; "it makes me feel nervous." And, with a curiosity as great as his own, Mrs. Millington broke the wax that sealed the dingy paper.

John watched her with fascinated eyes, and his excitement was intense when the wrapper fell, and revealed a small, old-fashioned daguerreotype-case. Without a word Mrs. Millington handed the case to John, and with trembling fingers the boy touched the tiny spring that fastened it. Two faces smiled upon him then. One was young and lovely, the face of a woman whose girlhood had scarcely passed, and the other was a man's face, young also, but resolute and earnest; and as Mrs. Millington looked at it, she fancied she could trace in it a strong resemblance to the boyish face that was studying it with such intense interest.

A slip of paper, yellowed with time, but still fragrant with some faint, subtle perfume, was folded inside the case, and on it, in a woman's fine, running hand, these words were written:

“Entreat me not to leave thee, *or* to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people *shall* be my people, and thy God my God.

“The Lord do so to me, and more also, if *ought* but death part thee and me.”

There was no signature attached to this solemn promise, but where the name would naturally have been written, once more appeared the two Latin words, “*Tenax propositi.*”

What did it mean? Whose were those likenesses, and what relation were they to himself? John’s lips trembled as he tried to ask those questions, and Mrs. Millington, since she could not answer them, wisely refrained from guesses.

“Go to Mr. Crosby,” she advised; and John hurried to the minister’s study.

“Mr. Crosby, look!” he panted; and Mr. Crosby looked, and then cautiously questioned the excited boy.

Like Mrs. Millington, Mr. Crosby thought he could see a resemblance between John and the faces in the picture, but he dared not say so to the eager boy. He had a great dread of awakening vain hopes and expectations in his mind, and when John begged him to tell him what he thought, he only said:

“I will try to find that man, this afternoon,

John, and, if possible, I will make him tell me if these pictures have any connection with your history. It is quite probable that the man is a foolish, half-insane creature, who, since he befriended you, feels kindly towards you, and fancies that this daguerreotype, that he has evidently highly valued, may be of service to you. Don't attach too much importance to it, my boy; it may bear no more relation to you and yours than—Adam bore to Abraham,” he added, searching for a comparison and thinking that, where the deluge separated, John would see little connection.

But the boy's answer was prompt. “At least Abraham descended from Adam,” he exclaimed, “and besides, Mr. Crosby, there is the motto.”

“*Tenax propositi*—tenacious of purpose,” Mr. Crosby said, as he once more took up the slip of paper. “Yes,” he said, with studied coolness, “that is a very good motto, John, but it tells us very little.”

“I think it tells a good deal, Mr. Crosby,” John insisted. “Don't you remember the necklace? *Tenax propositi* is stamped on that, and I know—I know perfectly well—that in some way this picture belongs to me. O Mr. Crosby—” and the poor boy's voice was broken and choked with something like a sob as he spoke—“do you think—do you think it can possibly be a picture of—my parents?”

Yes, Mr. Crosby did remember the necklace, and he had recognized the motto at once, but he had hoped the boy was ignorant of it. Now, however, as he saw that John knew everything, he said very gently, but seriously :

“My boy, it may be ; but, whether it is or is not, we cannot possibly determine now. There are mysteries connected with your life that we cannot, in our ignorance, unriddle to-day ; we must leave them with God. And remember,” the minister added with grave emphasis, “remember, if you think too much about what has happened to-day, and allow yourself to indulge vain dreams and foolish speculations about it, you will only make yourself discontented and unhappy, and in the end gain nothing but disappointment. Accept your life as it is, my boy. This motto—‘tenacious of purpose’—does seem, in some way, to belong to you. Make it your own by holding fast to all things that are good and true, and then let it be the firm purpose of your soul to gain for yourself a character that will exalt a lowly name, and add new dignity to a high one ; and though you may never find your earthly father, believe, with unwavering faith, that your Father in heaven has a plan for your life, and will make all things work together for your good, if you will but give him the love and obedience of a child.”

Mr. Crosby’s quiet and sensible words produced

the result he desired, and John went back to Mrs. Millington, sobered both in face and mind, and without any disposition to indulge extravagant hopes and day-dreams.

True to his promise, Mr. Crosby, in company with Mr. Millington, spent the afternoon in searching for the wood-cutter, but they only succeeded in learning that his name was Francis Sharp, and that nearly a year before he had appeared in Hermitsville as a tramp, and had been employed by a farmer to cut wood in the forest. With the exception of a short absence in the winter, he had worked faithfully until the day before, when he had suddenly quitted his employer, giving as a reason that he was tired of staying in one place, and thought he would tramp again for a spell, for justice would never get done if he sat still and did nothing. He had seemed friendless and homeless, and had apparently no purpose either in coming to or leaving Hermitsville; and when Mr. Crosby suggested that he was probably insane, he was assured by those who had had most to do with the man, that instead of being insane, he seemed remarkably keen and shrewd, though he had a singular habit of talking about justice, as something it was the great object of his life to either get or do. That was all that was known about him, except that at noon that very day he had bought a ticket for New York and left on the train for that city.

“It is better so,” Mr. Crosby said to Mr. Millington, as they turned homeward. “Francis Sharp—F. S. : those are the very initials engraved on that necklace ; if John is in any way connected with that tramp, I hope he will never know it. And, in any case, we may wait with patience ; for, though God’s book of revelations may be opened slowly, it will be opened surely, and our Father’s time is better than ours.”

There was nothing more that could be said or done about the matter ; and the last few hours of John’s stay at home were quiet and tender ones, spent in the society of the true and generous friends who loved him as a son and brother, and were most gratefully loved in return.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCHOOL-DAYS.

“In the way that he shall choose,
He will teach us.
Not a lesson we shall lose ;
All shall reach us.

“Strange and difficult indeed
We may find it,
But the blessing that we need
Is behind it.”—*Frances Ridley Havergal.*

IT was near sunset the next day when Mr. Crosby and John left the train at Hancock ; and a short walk soon brought them to the house of Professor Selwyn, Mr. Crosby's friend, who had offered to give John a home.

The introduction was soon over. Professor Selwyn was teacher of Latin and Greek ; a grave man, who would be kind, when he thought of it, but who was usually so absorbed with the languages of Homer and Cicero that he forgot to make much use of his own. He greeted Mr. Crosby cordially, looked critically—much as if he were a Greek manuscript offered to him for review—at John for a moment, and then turned to

his old college friend, and would soon have forgotten the boy's presence or even existence, if Mr. Crosby had not reminded him of it.

When reminded, he looked at the boy again, said, not unkindly, but in an indifferent tone: "So you think you want to be a student, do you, John? Well, to-morrow you can take your first steps in that direction." And then, without waiting for John's timid answer, he rang the bell and ordered the neat-looking colored servant, who answered it, to give the boy his supper and then show him to his room.

"Good night, my boy, I will see you in the morning," Mr. Crosby said kindly, and with a very lonely, homesick feeling, John followed the woman down-stairs into a neat basement kitchen.

The kitchen was as neat as the woman, who apparently reigned in it with undisputed authority.

"Sit down," she said, in a pleasant voice, to John, and then she moved with quick, but quiet steps from her pantries to the fire, and from the fire to the little table she drew up before John.

"You mus' be hungry," she said, as she placed a tempting plateful of smoking chicken fricassee before him. "Now, do eat. I don't min' cookin' for folks, if they'll only eat when I've done."

Thus urged, John tried faithfully to eat his supper, but a few mouthfuls sufficed. "It is very

good," he said, "but I believe I'm not hungry to-night."

The woman looked at him with a pair of liquid black eyes, that were at once keen and pleasant.

"Don't you go for to be homesick, now, honey," she said reprovingly; "'cause it jest aint no use. It wont help nothin', but it will jest make everything seem a great deal harder to bear an' to do."

John could not deny the wisdom of the woman's kind advice; but though he pressed his lips and winked vigorously, the treacherous tell-tale tears threatened every moment to fall, and the sympathizing eyes that were watching him saw it all.

"Don't you know how to sing or whistle?" their owner suddenly asked.

John's face brightened at the question. "I can do both," he answered.

"Then you jest go right along an' sing something, honey. I allus sing when I want to cry, 'cause, you see, the tears they jest blind the eyes an' hinder the work; but the singing—why, that's jest like oil to 'chinery—makes the works go smoother. So sing ahead, boy; I'd like to hear you."

John hesitated a moment, and then, in his clear, boyish voice, he sang:

"What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear;
What a privilege, to carry
Everything to God in prayer.

“Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.”

The woman had stopped in her rapid work of clearing the table, and now stood by it, looking at John.

“Yes, that’s jest gospel truth,” she said seriously. “Now, aint it strange, that when we believe so much folks, who aint no friends at all, tell us, we can’t believe when this Friend tells us to bring all our troubles to him? It’s very strange that we should be so contrary, I think, boy, don’t you?”

Just then the door creaked softly, and the next moment a little hand pushed it open, and a little girl of ten entered the kitchen. With a spring and a skip she ran to the woman’s side and, standing there, looked curiously and yet shyly at John.

“La, now, Miss Ruth, what do you want, dearie?” the woman asked, as she looked down with evident pride and affection on the child.

“I want to stay here, Aunt Phillis,” Miss Ruth answered, in a tone that told plainly that she felt sure of being allowed to do as she wanted.

“Well, I ’spect you can stay then, honey; Aunt Phillis aint never shet the door on ye yet; but don’t you see, dear, we’ve got company?”

Ruth looked at Aunt Phillis with a smile, gave

her a tiny nod of her bright head, and then drew nearer the table.

"Were you singing just now?" she asked, as she clasped her small hands, rested them on the table, and looked with serious attention at John.

"Yes," John answered, as he returned her sober gaze with his pleasant, boyish smile.

"Sing again, then, wont you?" the little lady half asked and half commanded.

"What do you want me to sing?" John asked obediently.

"O, everything you know," was the comprehensive answer.

And, feeling now at liberty to make his own selection, John began to sing one of his favorite Sunday-school hymns, while his little hearer stood gravely before him, and listened with the deepest interest and appreciation.

"Are you the new boy?" she asked, when John at last paused for breath.

"I believe so," he answered.

"Oh, I know you are," she returned, with confidence. "I heard papa telling Aunt Phillis about you. I didn't much want you to come," she went on confidentially. "I don't like boys much. Papa's last boy used to say, 'I am busy; don't bother me, little girl;' and I don't think that was very respectful, do you?"

John shook his head in emphatic disapproval

of the last boy's disrespectful conduct, and the little princess gravely continued :

"No, I didn't like him, but I believe I am going to like you. And now," she asked, as if that complimentary assurance deserved a high reward, "you will sing for me whenever I want to hear you, wont you?"

"Yes," John said, with decision, and then sought to qualify his hasty promise with, "when I have time."

"O, but you must always make time to sing when I ask you," soberly replied the dignified little lady.

"Miss Ruth," Aunt Phillis said now, "your supper is ready, and your papa wants you in the dining-room."

Ruth hesitated a second, and then with a child's sweet, innocent grace came close to John's side.

"Good-night," she said, as she laid her little hand in his; "I thank you for singing, and I hope you will like it here just as much as I b'lieve we will all like you." And turning before he could answer, with the spring and skip that seemed her natural way of moving, the little girl followed Aunt Phillis to the dining-room.

Sympathy, like a strong, supporting hand, is often a wonderful help over a hard place, and even when the unconscious child had left the

kitchen, the cheer of her bright, sweet influence remained, and, encouraged by it, John shook off the homesickness that had threatened to overcome him, and once more felt hopeful and able to anticipate with pleasure the coming of the next day. It was still early in the evening when Aunt Phillis proposed to show him his room, and tired with the long day's travel and excitement he was glad to accept her offer. He found his room small and plain, but neat and comfortable, and his last thought before he fell asleep was that he was a very fortunate boy and would try to be a very good one.

The next day his school-life began in earnest. Early in the morning Mr. Crosby accompanied him to the principal's office, and he was examined and his place in the school assigned him. Then his new duties were explained to him, and with a sense of great responsibility he touched the bell-rope for the first time, and took possession of the mail-bag.

Days, weeks, and even months went rapidly by. John was tested, as Mr. Crosby had warned him he would be; but he stood the tests nobly. If his coarse dress, and the undisguised fact that he was a poor boy, toiling to acquire an education, ever tempted some of his rich and foolish school-mates to treat him contemptuously, the equally plain and undeniable fact that his name was, as

the principal himself said, fast becoming a synonym in that school for faithfulness, honor and excellence in study, compelled them to respect him, and acknowledge his superiority.

Character tells everywhere, and it told in that busy school, though the boy who was soon so influential there never labored to acquire influence, or thought of himself as superior to his school-mates, but only aimed with all the strength of his will to do his duty.

At first, Professor Selwyn—though he faithfully performed his promises, and gave John a comfortable home, supplied him with books, and made no unreasonable demands upon him for service—seemed to feel little or no interest in him. John took his meals alone in the kitchen, where Aunt Phillis carefully cared for him, and his place, when in the house, was either in the kitchen or in his own room.

Professor Selwyn was a widower, who divided his time between his library and his class room, and seemed sometimes in danger of forgetting that to know books was not the whole duty of man.

His house was presided over by an unmarried sister, a quiet, reserved woman, whose real kindness of feeling was deep, like still waters, and like them seldom overflowed in expression. She rarely praised ; that she as rarely censured had to

content her friends and dependants. The good genius of the quiet household was Aunt Phillis. Clouds never could darken the sun so that she could not see something to be thankful for, and reserve never could chill her warm heart, or silence the flow of her simple, kindly words.

In and out, from library to parlor, and from parlor to kitchen, skipped little Ruth, ruling wherever she went, but ruling with childhood's fairy wand of love, and truthfulness, and innocence.

Between John and herself a strong friendship soon existed. He was loyal to his promise, and never too busy to attend to her, and she soon learned to trust him with her childish troubles, and bring to him the difficulties she encountered in her simple studies.

"John," she said, once in the early part of a long winter evening, as perched in a high chair she sat opposite John at the kitchen table with an open geography before her, "John, I wish Christopher Columbus had never discovered America."

John looked up from his Latin grammar and gave her a pleasant smile. "Why?" he asked.

"O," she said with energy, "because then there would not be so much for us to learn. It has made this world a great deal harder to study about, I think, John."

"It has made the world a great deal easier to

live in, though," John answered, with the wisdom of his fourteen years.

"Has it?" Ruth asked, in surprise. "Well, after all, John, it hasn't made it very easy to live in, for old Mrs. Black was calling on Aunt Anna this morning, and she said she found this world such a hard place, she should be glad when her time came to leave it and go to heaven."

John nodded pleasantly, but made no remark, and soon, forgetful of all other matters, was engrossed with his translation. Ruth waited awhile, and then suddenly spoke again.

"John," she said, as she looked at him with her little face all knotted and puckered in her perplexity, "John, I've been thinking—"

"Well, Ruthie, what about?" John asked, as he good-naturedly pushed aside his book, and waited for the little girl to reveal the thoughts that seemed such weighty ones to her small mind.

"Why, John, I'm wondering," and Ruth looked at him with a solemn expression that made him think of a little, old woman, "if all the world is discovered now—and I suppose it is, don't you? because you know we have got both sides to it now, and so there can't be anything left for a new Columbus to discover—and yet, if it is still such a hard place to live in, that old Mrs. Black wants to leave it, what can ever make it an easy place to live in?"

"Jest hear that child," Aunt Phillis exclaimed admiringly, as she dropped the gay pieces she was arranging for a bed-quilt, and looked with proud eyes at her little mistress. "La," she advised, when, after a moment's study of Ruth's face, she turned back to her patchwork, "don't you go for to bother your little head over such questions. The p'losophers now, they've been talkin' 'bout that same question since long before you was born, an' they aint no nearer answerin' it now, than they was then. It's one of them unanswerable questions we read about, aint it, now?" And Aunt Phillis appealed to John.

The boy turned to her with a serious but bright face. He was not given to preaching; his daily life bore witness to his faith, and his faith kept his words pure and sweet, and yet in words he seldom proclaimed that faith; but now, Ruth and Aunt Phillis together had given him a solemn and beautiful thought, and with simple, earnest directness, he answered:

"I think Jesus Christ is the answer to that question, Aunt Phillis."

"Jesus is in heaven," Ruth said solemnly.

"He is watching over us, though," John said, with confidence.

"But heaven is so far away," Ruth said, in a puzzled tone. "Does it do any good for him to watch us from there?"

"I believe he is near us all the time, Ruthie," John answered; "but, see here, do you remember the other day, when you were sliding on the ice in the garden, and I was up in the garret? Did it do any good for me to watch you from there?"

"Yes," Ruth said quickly, "when I fell and cried, you ran down and picked me up."

"I think that is what Jesus does for us, Ruthie," John said reverently. "We fall and hurt ourselves very often in this world, but when we cry to Jesus, he hears us and comes very soon to help us."

"And does that make the world easier to live in?" Ruth asked, going back now to her first thought.

"I think it must, Ruthie. I don't think anything could be very hard to do or to bear if Jesus loved and helped us through it, do you?"

"Does he love and help you?" Ruth asked earnestly.

"Yes," John answered, in the glad confidence of his childlike faith, "he always has, and I know he always will."

Ruth sat back in her chair, folded her little hands, and looked at John much as if his face was a page on which she was studying a new lesson.

"John," she said suddenly, as if she had at last found the solution of some troublesome problem, "John, do you read the Bible?"

“Yes,” John said quietly.

“Most boys don’t, I guess,” the little girl said, with a wise nod of her curly head, “and I guess that makes the difference. I don’t like most boys. I think they are un-en-du-ra-ble—” with a division of the syllables and an emphasis on each that gave additional force to the word. “Well, John,” she said, after another little time of serious consideration, “if you read the Bible, I will, too.” And jumping from her chair, she ran out of the kitchen, but soon returned with a book.

“See, John,” she said, “this is my Bible. Aunt Anna gave it to me a year ago. I’ve kept it nice, haven’t I? But then, you see,” she innocently explained, “I’ve kept it in a box most of the time, for it is such a queer book I never can tell what it means. But if you read it, I will; so, John, please tell me where to begin.”

“Why don’t you begin at the beginning, honey?” Aunt Phillis asked.

“It is so thick, it will take so long to get through it,” the little girl said doubtfully. “Find me an easy place, John,” she coaxed, as she turned from Aunt Phillis to him, “with words that wont want any spelling.”

John could not help feeling that his study that evening was subject to many interruptions, but he gave the little girl a kind smile as he said :

"I don't know about the easy places, Ruthie, but I will show you where I am reading now." And taking the Bible he found the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, and with a very serious face Ruth went back to her seat.

"Read aloud, honey," Aunt Phillis requested.

"Shall I?" the little girl asked of John. And, as he closed his book and nodded affirmatively, in her clear, childish voice, she slowly read the first verse.

The plain kitchen was very quiet. The lamp-light revealed the placid, black face of Aunt Phillis, who had dropped her patchwork and was listening reverently; it lit up the boyish, but earnest face, already kindling with high resolves, with which John was listening, and it touched with tender grace the face and figure of the little reader. With sweet, clear emphasis she slowly read, "And Jesus called a little child unto him." And then she paused and looked at John.

"That was when Jesus was on earth, Ruthie," John said, in answer to her unspoken question.

"Was it?" she said eagerly. "Wouldn't it be beautiful if he was on earth, and could call little children to him now, John?"

"Yes; but I think he does call them, now," John thoughtfully answered.

"How?" the little girl asked in surprise.

"Every time you feel in your heart that you

want to be good and love Jesus, I think Jesus is calling you to him," John simply explained.

"Is he?" Ruth looked down again on her book. "That little child went to him, John," she said, in a moment, in a glad voice, "for listen to this: Jesus 'set him in the midst.' And John," she added, in a low, sweet whisper, "I am going to him, too."

It was only a child's resolve; but the child's will adhered to it, the child's heart responded gladly to the love that called it, and years after, Ruth looked through memory's glass back to that Bible-reading in the plain old kitchen, as the time when, consciously, she took her first step heavenward.

"If ever a house had a blessin', this 'ere house has one in that boy," Aunt Phillis said often in those days, with emphatic nods of her turbaned head; but John went his quiet way, more anxious to be found faithful to his Master than to be praised by men, and the years slipped by, until he had passed his seventeenth birthday, and had been more than three years at Hancock.

Outwardly, in all that time, his position had changed little. He was still plainly and even poorly dressed, and his place was still one of service and dependence in Professor Selwyn's family; but he had advanced rapidly in his studies—one year more and he would be ready

for college—he was happy in the respect and confidence of his teachers, and totally unprepared for the shadow that fell upon him now.

He still had charge of the school mails, and much to his surprise, one day the principal suddenly entered the little office, where he was opening the mail-bag and distributing the letters in the students' boxes.

“Ah! Good-morning, John,” Dr. Clinch said carelessly; “the bag is pretty full this morning, isn't it?”

“Yes, sir,” John answered respectfully, but without pausing in his busy work.

“The boys receive a good many letters,” Dr. Clinch remarked, in an indifferent tone, after watching John a few moments, “and I suppose many of them contain money. Do you know how to tell a money letter, John?”

“That depends upon the way in which the money is wrapped,” John answered, with a smile. “Folks show character in their letters just as they do in their business, I think. Some people just put a bill inside a thin slip of paper, and you can be almost sure from the feeling of the envelope that there is soft paper inside, and then you are pretty safe in concluding that the soft paper means money.”

“Is that the only way to tell?” Dr. Clinch asked, as he closed the door he had been leaning

against, and seated himself near John and watched him closely.

"Sometimes you can tell by holding a letter up to the light," John replied. "Now, I should say that this letter," and John held one up as he spoke, "had money in it. It looks and feels as if it had."

"Let me see it," and Dr. Clinch extended his hand.

"I have a mind to see if you are a good detective, John," he added, as he broke the seal to the envelope and drew out the sheet. "Ah, yes, you are quite right. Here is a ten-dollar bank-note. I will keep it, and give it to the owner myself, and explain why I opened the envelope. By the way, have there been more money letters than usual received here lately, John?"

"There have been a good many," John carelessly replied, "but I don't know the exact number."

Dr. Clinch made no reply. The students were coming for their letters now, and for a little while John was fully occupied in delivering them. Just as the last one was handed to its owner, Dr. Clinch arose. "Come with me to my office, John," he quietly ordered; "I have something to say to you." And without a word John obeyed him.

"John," Dr. Clinch said, when they were in

his office and the door closed, "John, I have a very disagreeable and painful duty to perform. Several letters containing money for students here have been recently lost. The first complaint was made three months ago. We have had a detective employed, and we know positively that some, at least, of those letters, were received at the village post-office. It is reasonable to suppose they were delivered to you. The serious question is, what became of them after they were placed in your hands?"

Dr. Clinch paused, and looked searchingly at John. The boy was very pale, but his clear eyes met his inquisitor's without quailing.

"I do not know, Dr. Clinch," he answered firmly.

"Every letter placed in my mail-bag, or that has passed through my hands, has been delivered to its owner."

"You are sure of that, John?"

"Yes, sir, I am sure."

"When you first came here, John," Dr. Clinch said, after a little silence, "you had no spending money. Lately you have been seen with several dollars in your pocket-book, and you purchased a Shakespeare and a Milton at the village bookstore. Where did you get your money, John?"

"I have been reading proof for the editor of the *Hancock Herald*," the boy answered firmly.

“Reading proof, with all your other reading and studying, John?”

“Yes, sir. The editor will confirm my words,” the boy said proudly.

“You have called upon a good witness to testify in your favor, John. The *Hancock Herald*, as you probably know, has passed within a few days into other hands, and the editor you mean sailed yesterday for Glasgow.”

John grew, if possible, paler, but made no answer.

Dr. Clinch was silent for awhile, and played a tattoo on his table, as he often did when perplexed.

“John,” he said, soon, “I wish you would trust me, and tell me the truth.”

“The truth is what I have said, sir.”

“I am afraid you are mistaken,” Dr. Clinch said, in a grave voice. “It gives me great pain to doubt you, and knowing how free from reproach your school-life here has been, I would not suspect you now if I could possibly avoid doing so; but, John, here comes the blackest possible proof of your guilt. At my request, Professor Selwyn, this morning, after you left for school, examined your room, and among your private papers in—I think he said—your journal, he found these envelopes.” And Dr. Clinch took out of a drawer two torn envelopes addressed to

students then in the school, and bearing postmarks that proved that they had passed through the mail.

“These two young men have both lost money,” Dr. Clinch said severely. “It was sent from the places these envelopes were mailed from, and sent also at the very time these envelopes were dated. John, unless you can satisfactorily explain your possession of these envelopes, and prove your innocence, it will be my sorrowful duty to have you arrested as a thief.”

John pressed his hands to his heart, as if a knife had stabbed him. Whiter he could not look, but his face was very calm, as he said in a low tone: “I would explain it, if I could; but it is all a terrible mystery to me. I cannot account for it.”

Dr. Clinch was a man who aimed always to be perfectly just, but he was also a man of terrible severity when dealing with those whom he believed to be guilty and unrepentant. John's record through all the years he had known him had been unblemished; his character for integrity was higher than any other boy's in the school; but still, here were the black facts testifying against him, and he either could not or would not explain them. Dr. Clinch waited some minutes, but the silence remained unbroken.

“I am sorry for you, John,” he said then,

as he touched a little bell on his table, "but you will have to learn from bitter experience now, what you have all your life been carefully taught, that the way of the transgressor is hard."

John still remained silent, and, fully convinced now that he was guilty, Dr. Clinch turned to the servant who, in a minute, had answered his ring.

"Call the constable," he ordered, in a cold, stern voice, and in a very short time John was lodged in a prisoner's cell.

No words could describe the poor boy's agony as the iron door closed upon him. He was innocent, and yet he knew not how to prove his innocence. His simple word would not be accepted, but he could offer no other evidence. All his life he had felt the chill weight of a shadow that had saddened and subdued him; but the shadow that had fallen upon him now seemed too sad, too dark, and too crushing for him to bear its weight and live. He threw himself prostrate on the bare, stone floor, and minutes that seemed like weary hours dragged by and brought him no relief.

He knew he ought to pray, but heart and faith alike seemed paralyzed, and prayer, in these first, blank moments of distress, seemed like a broken reed that could give him no support. But, suddenly, as he lay there moaning in his pain, with a power that calmed the fierce struggle in his soul

came the memory of the solemn promise, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee."

It was a promise, but it was linked with a command. The troubled soul must do its part, and "call," and from the depths John's cry went up to the Father, whose children know him to be the hearer and answerer of prayer.

The call went up. The answer came in a peace the world with all its wrongs could not destroy, and John rose from the floor, once more calm and strong. He could bear even his disgrace now; he could wait until, in his own good time, the Lord lifted the shadow and made his honor clear and stainless as the sunlight.

Slowly an hour or more went by, then quick footsteps approached the door, it was opened, and Professor Selwyn came in. John had known him as a man who, though indifferently kind, seemed always absorbed and unapproachable. But now the professor's manner was greatly changed; with a quick step he came to John's side and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Did you think I had deserted you?" he asked. "My poor boy, I had to comply with the principal's request and search your room this morning, but I never supposed he would push matters so energetically, and I have come now to assure you that my confidence in you is still un-

shaken. I have bailed you out, John. Come home now, and we will soon ferret out your enemy, and prove your innocence."

He had not lost all his friends, then ; better even than release from prison was the comfort that assurance gave the troubled boy, and there was gratitude as well as sorrow in his heart as he returned with Professor Selwyn to his home.

When Professor Selwyn was once interested, and saw the necessity of leaving Greek manuscripts alone, and attending to the plain realities of every-day life, he could act with energy and wisdom. Mr. Crosby was immediately summoned, and the kind minister, accompanied by Mr. Millington, was soon on the spot. A skilful lawyer was engaged, and every possible means to prove John's innocence employed. The editor of the *Hancock Herald* had sailed, as Dr. Clinch said, for Europe, but a telegram met him on his arrival at Queenstown, and his answer fully corroborated John's statement.

It remained now to explain the presence of those envelopes in John's room and to find the real thief.

"Have you any enemies in the school?" the lawyer asked him on the day of his examination in his office.

John did not know of one ; and to the honor of the Hancock students it ought to be recorded

that in the hour of their schoolmate's troubles they rallied around him, and loudly asserted their belief in his innocence.

"Have you any acquaintances in the village?" he was asked now.

"No, none in particular; certainly none who would wish to harm me."

"Don't be too unsuspicious," the lawyer rather cynically observed. "Have you any acquaintances in the post-office?"

"Only the postmaster, and the clerk who fills my mail-bag," John answered.

"Ah! has he ever visited you in your room?"

John started; a sudden remembrance brought him at once quick relief and sharp pain. To his generous nature it was a bitter thing to be forced to prove his own innocence at the expense of another's good name. But the lawyer waited for his answer, and he briefly stated the facts that last question had recalled to his remembrance. The young post-office clerk had met him in the bookstore when he purchased his Shakespeare; he had expressed great admiration for that poet himself, and had proposed to John that they should read some of the plays together; only an evening or two before John's arrest he had been in his room, and they had read *Macbeth*.

The lawyer nodded sagaciously. "Pity he hadn't been more impressed with *Macbeth's* remorse," he thought, but he only asked:

"Did you leave your room during his stay?"

"Only for a few moments," John answered.

"Aunt Phillis called me, and I went to the kitchen for about ten minutes."

"Where was your journal?"

"On the table, where I have always kept it."

"Ah!" The lawyer paused, made a brief note of the conversation, and then turned and looked at Dr. Clinch, Professor Selwyn, Mr. Millington and Mr. Crosby, who were all present and all watching him with interest.

"Before we proceed any farther, I think I will have an interview with that young clerk," he quietly remarked, and followed by John's anxious friends, he left the office.

A few hours later John was summoned to Professor Selwyn's library.

"It is all right, my dear boy," Mr. Millington said, as he took his hand.

"Yes, you are clear; your innocence is clear as the sunshine," Mr. Crosby explained.

"I knew I could trust you, John," Professor Selwyn said, in his calm, quiet voice.

"Thank God," John said, with solemn gratitude, as the shadow that had threatened to blight his young life was so mercifully cleared away.

A little later, when they were all calmer, they told him of their interview with the young clerk, and of his full confession. He had stolen the

money, and when he found that the lost letters were being searched for, and a close watch kept for the thief, he had selected John, on account of his connection with the post-office, as the one most likely to remove suspicion from himself. Now, when his guilt was revealed, interested friends came forward to shield him, the stolen money was refunded, and the young man removed from Hancock, and John never met him again.

There fell no other shadow to darken John's school-days, and his last year at Hancock was his happiest year there, for he had been tried, and, like gold from the fire, came forth the brighter for the trial.

From that time Professor Selwyn became one of his warmest friends. John had his place now at his table, and was always welcome in his library, and the quiet, studious man grew daily more interested in the boy whose character prophesied only good of his future.

CHAPTER IX.

SOLITUDE.

“ I am glad to think
I am not bound to make the wrong go right,
But only to discover, and to do
With cheerful heart, the work that God appoints.”
—*Jean Ingelow.*

IT was in the autumn of his seventeenth year that John entered college: four years later he left his Alma Mater after graduating with high honors.

He had worked his way through college as he had through Hancock Academy. He had found that there were many ways in which an educated, upright, conscientious boy—who was able and ready to work—could help himself, and he had quickly availed himself of every opportunity that was offered to him. When he entered college he had refused any longer to receive even his clothing from Mr. Millington. At eighteen his adopted brothers and sisters had all supported themselves, and with manly pride John decided that what the own children did, the adopted child ought to do and would do.

His course had not been always bright with sun-

shine; he had known many dark days, when, like the children of Israel in their wilderness wanderings, his heart had felt much discouraged because of the way; and, like all other strong natures, he knew well what it was to struggle with doubts and fierce temptations. But as the wild storms that sweep the forest only make the young trees strike their roots deeper and stand more firmly in their places, so the struggles of those early years, had only made John stronger, manlier, and more self-reliant—because more God-dependent. And now, as he stood upon the threshold of manhood, those who watched him felt that, if health was spared him, he would carve his own way, and carve it well.

Tenax propositi—tenacious of purpose—whether his family motto or not, described him well.

What he attempted he accomplished. The friend or the cause that he espoused, he clung to. The principles that he professed to believe, he adhered to and supported.

He still loved music devotedly: loved it even better, perhaps, as he studied and understood its exquisite harmonies; but though in his boyish dreams he had thought sometimes that he would like to devote his life to music, he had no such ambition now.

His friends had often wondered what profession he would choose; medicine, or the ministry; it

must be one of the two, they thought; but John quietly made his own choice, and to Mr. Crosby's disappointment, though not to his surprise, he chose the law.

He had found out what he was made for. The legal mind, the intense sense of justice, the burning indignation at wrong, that the minister had long years before discovered in him, were not given him for nothing. And as John looked out upon the world, and saw the wrongs that were everywhere crying for redress, and the woes that were pleading for help, he longed to take his place as a soldier in the struggle, and fight with all his strength for the right.

"I found out what I was made for the day Lawyer Osborne examined me," he said smilingly to Mr. Crosby one day in summer, during a brief visit to Hermitsville, "and I hope," he added, almost solemnly, "I hope it may some day be in my power to do for some poor boy just what he did for me."

"Ah," Mr. Crosby answered, with a little of the disappointment he felt finding expression in his voice, "if lawyers only used their skill in righting wrongs, John, their profession would be a stronger power in this world for righteousness than, I grieve to say, I believe it to be to-day."

"Then, if shrewd, unscrupulous men have ever dared to make the law only a stepping-stone by

which to attain to fame and wealth, there is the greater need that faithful Christian men should devote themselves to it, and free it from reproach," John said, with earnestness. "The law! why it is the imperishable granite that supports society, Mr. Crosby. Think how grandly that glorious old Jewish law stands there, at the very beginning of the book we both reverence and love."

Mr. Crosby shook his head a little sadly; "I will not argue with you, my boy," he said. "So long as there is sin in this world, I suppose there must be lawyers. But I did hope," and the good minister's eyes rested affectionately on the young man as he spoke, "I did hope that you would make a different choice, and devote your noble powers to the doing of the noblest work God ever intrusted to a human soul, that of saving your fellow-men."

The young man's face grew very serious, but a beautiful light shone in his clear eyes, as he left his seat, and came and stood beside his faithful friend.

"Dear Mr. Crosby," he said, and his voice trembled with feeling as he spoke, "hear me now. I have consecrated myself, body, soul and mind, to my Maker. And here upon this book that holds his sacred law"—and John laid his hand reverently on the Bible as he spoke—"I do solemnly promise to devote all my powers to serving him, and

to helping and saving my fellow-men. Throughout my life—with God's help—I will keep myself pure from fraud, and all false dealing, and I will undertake no cause where there is not a wrong to be righted, a right to be maintained, and the justice and honor of my Father in heaven, and my brother upon earth, to be supported and vindicated."

"Amen," Mr. Crosby said reverently. "It is a vow, my boy; may God give you strength to keep it."

There was moisture in the young man's eyes of which he had no cause to be ashamed, and going to a window he stood looking out on the familiar landscape he had known from childhood, until presently Mr. Crosby quietly asked:

"How old are you now, John?"

"Twenty-two next Christmas."

Mr. Crosby waited a moment, and looked as if he were considering some serious question, but when he spoke he only said:

"Now that you have chosen your profession, you have to prepare yourself for its practice. When do you begin?"

John left the window and came back to his seat near his friend.

"I have, at least, two years of hard study and reading before me, before I can hope to be admitted to the bar," he answered, in a sober, business-like

tone, "but it is possible for me to do a good deal of that reading by myself; and though I intend to begin work immediately, I do not propose this winter to attend lectures; instead of doing that, I am going to teach."

"Teach!" Mr. Crosby exclaimed. "Take care, my boy; the strongest mind will fail if taxed beyond endurance. Remember, when the winter promises to be long, that man is sensible who, having just so much fuel, burns it prudently and does not consume it all in one great fire."

John nodded gravely. "Your simile is a very true one," he said, "but, dear Mr. Crosby, I am very strong; work has never hurt me yet. And," he added in a reverent tone, "believing, as I firmly do, that all my powers of mind and body alike belong to him who created me in his image, and confessing, as I also do, that I am accountable to my Creator for the care I take of his gifts, as well as for the use I make of them, can not you trust me to squander none of them recklessly? Look at me," he continued more lightly; "if Hercules could perform twelve gigantic tasks, don't you think I am able to perform at least one ordinary one?"

Mr. Crosby smiled, took off his spectacles, polished and replaced them, and then with an expression at once amused and thoughtful looked seriously at the young man, who, standing before

him with folded arms, waited in silence for his verdict.

What Mr. Crosby saw he did not express in words; but this is what he thought:

Tall, strong, and finely formed, with a noble head, a face that denotes sweetness of temper, and purity of heart, as well as rare gifts of mind, and an air and manner at once winning and commanding; yes, you are fitted to do more than an ordinary man's work in the world. The tasks of a great man are waiting for you in the future, and when you meet them may you prove equal to them.

"Well, sir?" John asked after the silence had lasted several minutes.

The minister slightly started, shook off the dream into which he was falling and said, with a smile, "Are you seeking a compliment, fair sir? I have none to give thee, but go thy way, and remember, that to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."

A few weeks after this conversation, on a lovely golden day late in September, at a lonely little station, hidden in the woods, far down on the south side of Long Island, John left the cars, and looked curiously about him for the conveyance that letters had promised should meet him there.

A little boy, standing alone at one end of the long platform, looked shyly at him a minute, and then slowly, with many sidelong glances, approached him.

“Good morning, sir,” he said bashfully, but in a voice, and with a manner, that at once denoted good-breeding. “Are you the new tutor?”

John looked down at the little man with a smile, that, like a warm sunbeam, quickly thawed all the ice between them. “I believe I am to be somebody’s tutor,” he said pleasantly, “do you know whose?”

The eyes that had been watching him with a very sober and doubtful expression brightened instantly. “I guess you’re to be mine,” their owner said in a confidential tone, as if he felt he was imparting important information. “Mine—I’m Jack, you know—and Will’s. Will is waiting for you in the carriage,” he proceeded, as he pointed to a handsome, open carriage, drawn up under the trees near by, and made a motion to lead John to it. “He wouldn’t come to meet you first, ’cause you see tutors are very uncertain; you can’t tell about ’em beforehand, and Will didn’t know as he’d like you.”

It was impossible not to smile a little at this frank information, but John’s tone was very grave as he asked:

“What do you think of the prospect, now? Should you say there was any hope for me with Will, now?”

“You don’t feel bad about it, do you?” the little fellow asked anxiously, impressed by the

gravity of John's voice. "I don't believe you need. Will's pretty 'cided, and makes up his mind for himself; but so do I," he added proudly. "And I tell you," and he came close to John as he spoke, "I don't feel a bit afraid of you, now;" with an emphasis on that last word, that plainly told how great the fear had been.

Very oddly, as John listened to the innocent boy, his thoughts went back to his first evening in Aunt Phillis' kitchen, and Ruth's sunny face seemed to be looking gravely, and yet trustfully at him, just as it had looked then. He had never seen her since he left Hancock at the close of his school-life. He had seen Professor Selwyn several times while at college, but it was more than four years now since he last bade Ruth good-bye. He had come to this quiet, out-of-the-way country nook through the recommendation of one of his college professors.

The family was a very old one, he had been told, living on a fine old place that belonged to their ancestors before the Revolution. He had no reason to suppose that there was any relationship existing between them and Professor Selwyn, and yet, how very like was that frank, confiding boy, to the winning little girl who had so wonderfully brightened his own boyhood.

Well, he concluded in a moment, the resemblance he fancied he could detect between them

was probably only due to some curious chain of association, such as often puzzles and eludes us. But the "electric chord wherewith we're darkly bound" had been struck, and John walked to the carriage, and made the acquaintance of the very "'cided" Will, with his mind full at once of memories of the past, and speculations as to the future. But he could not long continue to dream with such a sky above his head, and such merry, talkative companions as the two boys beside him.

The ride was a long one.

"These are all my father's woods," Will said proudly and abruptly; "don't you like them?"

"Yes, very much, indeed," John pleasantly answered.

"So do I," Will emphatically declared, completely won at last by the new tutor's admiration of his old ancestral inheritance.

"I never get tired of riding in them," the little boy said soon, with the ardor of a true lover of trees and forests, "but we are most through them now, for there's the gate."

The gate opened in a minute, and they entered a winding carriage drive bordered on each side with tall evergreens, that even on that sunshiny day threw shadows across their way.

It was a beautiful drive, and when the carriage stopped John saw before him an old commodious house, surrounded by grand old trees that might

have been thought a continuation of the forest, and that told a peaceful story of long years of slow and undisturbed growth. Before the house rippled and flashed the waters of a beautiful bay, while from beyond the bay

“The deep-voiced neighboring ocean
Spake, and in accents disconsolate answered
The wail of the forest.”

John's sympathy with nature was very great, and his first thought was one of almost passionate delight at the view before him. He was greeted very cordially by Mr. and Mrs. Rolfe, the parents of the boys, and soon felt that beautiful scenery was not the only pleasing feature of Solitude—as the old place was named—but that its greatest charm consisted in its possessors.

They were true and noble people, who, though justly proud of their honorable old name and family, were far above all purse-pride littleness, and believed that the teacher to whom they could safely intrust the education of their boys, merited, and ought to receive, their highest esteem.

Happy in his new home, John soon found his work no tax, but instead, a positive pleasure. Jack and Will were manly little fellows, possessed of bright, inquiring minds, very ready to receive information, and equally ready to respond to kindness. If John did not, like their former tutor,

inspire them with a fear that was akin to dislike, and which made them always, when possible, shun his society, he did better. He won their confidence, gained their respect, and made them quickly understand that while he would tolerate no wilful wrong-doing, he felt a genuine interest in their boyish sports, and was always ready to sympathize with and help them in all their little troubles and difficulties.

His own studying meanwhile prospered well, and thus steadily and pleasantly employed, time, as it is wont to do when nothing eventful marks its progress, went by on slippers that were at once swift and silent; and one morning with a start of surprise, John listened to his little pupils, as half wild with delight, they reminded him that grammar and histories were to be closed for a week, for Christmas was coming, and with Christmas not only Santa Claus with his gifts, but—what was still better—an uncle and aunt who had been living abroad for many years, and a cousin who was, as Will enthusiastically asserted, “everything a girl ought to be.”

“You will remain with us during the holidays, I hope, Mr. Millington,” Mrs. Rolfe said, in her pleasant and sincere voice. “If you have no previous engagement to call you away, I believe you will enjoy meeting our friends, and I am sure your presence here will add much to

their enjoyment. I do not want them," she acknowledged with a smile, "to find Solitude too lonely."

Mr. Rolfe laughed, and turning to John, said playfully, "Mrs. Rolfe is devotedly attached to Solitude, Mr. Millington, but, notwithstanding that, she fully endorses Cowper's words:

‘But grant me still a friend in my retreat,
Whom I may whisper—Solitude is sweet.’

"Yes," Mr. Rolfe continued warmly, "you must, by all means, remain with us, Mr. Millington. The holidays will probably be very cold, but with the help of warm hearths, and warmer hearts, we'll 'keep our Christmas merry still,' especially if you will stay to help us."

Thus kindly urged, John gratefully accepted the sincere invitation, and found himself looking forward with unusual interest to the coming of the expected guests.

"You see," little Jack told him confidentially, on the day they were to arrive, "we don't know our uncle and aunt very well. They have been travelling all over the world, for a great many years, and so of course we haven't seen much of them. Aunt Wilma is papa's sister, but she doesn't laugh like papa, for she lost her only little boy a great many years ago, and mamma says she has been living under a shadow ever since.

I think it must be dreadful to feel a shadow on you all the time, don't you?" And the little boy looked, with eyes that had seen nothing of life but its sunshine, inquiringly at John.

With a sad remembrance of the shadow whose dark folds he never expected to have lifted from his own heart, John nodded gravely, and then he said: "But your cousin—doesn't she make sunshine for your aunt?"

"I guess she would, if she lived with her," Jack said, with enthusiasm, "she'd make sunshine for anybody she belonged to; but you see, she doesn't belong to aunt and uncle. She is mamma's cousin's daughter, and we never knew her until last summer. And now," and the little man came close to John's side as he spoke, "Will and I feel a great 'sponsibility about her, for mamma says we must try to entertain her, and help to make a good time for her. And you know, Mr. Millington, Will and I don't know much about what makes a girl's good time, and we want you to help us find out, and make it for her, will you, please?" And both Jack and Will, who had joined him, waited anxiously for an answer.

John laughed. "My knowledge in that direction is not much greater than yours," he said; "but such as it is, it shall be at your service;" and well content with that promise the little boys

ran off and left the young man to his own reflections: reflections that, on the eve of his birthday, as well as of Christmas, were at once glad with the memories of the song first chanted over Bethlehem, and sad with the bitter consciousness that he was nameless and alone, without one heart that was bound to his by the strong ties of a common family and the same blood.

But his nature was too thoroughly sound and sweet for him long to indulge thoughts that could, with any truth, be called morbid, and checking a sigh he whispered softly,

“What God hath ordered must be best.”

And then he left the school-room and went down stairs to the library.

CHAPTER X.

STRANGERS.

“Ships that pass in the night and speak each other in passing;

Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;

So, on the ocean of life, we pass and speak one another,

Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence.”

—*Longfellow.*

JOHN found the library, as he thought he would, bright with lamp-light, and cheerful with the blaze of a great log fire, but deserted.

The short winter day had closed early, and it was now but little past five. The guests would not arrive for some time, and supper would wait their coming, and not sorry to be at liberty to choose his own society, John went to one of the well filled book-cases.

He said to himself: “It is Christmas eve, and whatever softens the heart, and fills it with thoughts of peace and good will to men, is welcome at this time.” He was about to take Dickens’ “Christmas Stories” from the shelf, when his eyes fell on “Little Dorrit”. The “Christmas Stories” were familiar to him as

C “twice-told tales,” but he had never read “Little Dorrit;” and with the thought, where there is so much still unread, I cannot afford to spend my time in re-reading well known books, he took the story of the brave, unselfish life, over which so many have laughed and cried, and was soon in fancy in Marseilles.

Forgetful of the passing of time, he was still reading when the boys bounded into the library.

“O, Mr. Millington,” they cried in great excitement, “they’ve come. The parlor is full of people, and the hall is full of boxes—Christmas boxes, you know—and now you must come, too, and be introduced to them.”

“To which,” John asked teasingly; “to the people or the boxes?”

“Oh, you know, Mr. Millington,” Jack answered, as too impatient to stand still he danced about the room on one foot; “never mind about grammar on Christmas eve; you understand what we mean. Mamma wants you, and you must come.”

“Must I?” John said pleasantly; “well, must is a very imperative word, and I suppose it must be obeyed. But let me first finish this sentence,” and turning again to his book, John slowly read a sentence that had at that moment caught his eye:

“In our course through life, we shall meet the

people who are coming to meet us from many strange places, and by many strange roads, and what is set to us to do to them, and what is set to them to do to us, will all be done."

John closed his book with a serious smile. "That is a fatalistic, and yet a solemn thought," he gravely soliloquized, but it need not trouble one who is a Christian. We do not meet nor part by chance. The children of the Father need not fear to meet those whom the Father has willed for them to meet, nor dread the consequences of deeds the Father has appointed to be done."

"Aren't you ever coming, Mr. Millington?" Will asked impatiently.

"Yes," John answered, with a little secret reluctance, and rising, he followed the boys to the parlor, while oddly through his mind that old thought persisted in passing—"We shall meet the people who are coming to meet us; and what they have to do to us, and we to do to them, will all be done."

Warm, bright, and luxurious, Mrs. Rolfe's parlor would have been an inviting room to enter had it been empty of everything but furniture and ornaments; but one glance at the group gathered about the fire, made John feel that it would be pleasant to be with them and in the atmosphere they seemed unconsciously to create.

“Come in, Mr. Millington,” Mrs. Rolfe said, as the young man appeared in the doorway; “I was beginning to fear the boys had forgotten their errand.” And with a manner that plainly expressed her high regard for him, Mrs. Rolfe presented John to the lovely gray-haired woman, and grave, noble-looking man who were standing beside her.

“My brother and sister, Mr. and Mrs. Scott,” she said, but John scarcely heard the name.

He was not romantic, not apt to have foolish fancies about the people he met in society, nor to be weakly impressed by the stray thoughts he chanced upon in books; but something about those two calm strangers moved him as strangers had never before had power to do; and though the introduction was of the quietest and most commonplace nature, and they glided directly into a matter-of-fact talk about the weather, the holidays, and the children, John was conscious all the while of a subtle influence he had never felt before, and in every pause of the conversation a low voice seemed to whisper—“What they have to do to us, and what we have to do to them, will all be done.”

Remembering the boys’ words about a parlor full of people, John was a little surprised to find there only Mr. and Mrs. Scott; but in a few minutes light feet descended the stairs, and then

gay voices were heard laughing merrily in the hall, and quoting playfully,

“By the pricking of my thumbs
Something wicked this way comes.”

Mr. Rolfe opened the door to admit the new comers.

“Is it, open locks whoever knocks?” one of them asked in gay response to Mr. Rolfe’s salute.

“Ah,” he said, as he took her hand, “I perceive we have been reading Shakespeare, since we met last, Miss Ruthie.”

“Not much,” she replied demurely, “only just enough to

“‘Endow thy purposes
With words that make them known.’”

“Miss Ruth,” Mr. Rolfe replied, “in return for that, you may expect to have my entire stock of quotations fired at your wise head some day, but you may go, Scot-free, now—since you are among the Scotts,” he added laughingly, as he dropped her hand and turned to greet her companions, a young girl and a gentleman, who were evidently as much at home with him as Miss Ruth herself.

“It has taken you two young ladies nearly as long to put girdles about your waists, as it took Puck to put one ‘round about the earth,’” Mr.

Scott said with a smile, as the young people approached the fire. "We have been waiting, and—what is of still more importance—Mrs. Rolfe's supper has been waiting for you at least thirty minutes."

"Have we kept you waiting? I am very sorry," and the young girl called Miss Ruth turned regretfully to Mrs. Rolfe. "We did not mean to be so tardy, but we found our rooms so very warm and pleasant that we forgot to hurry."

"That is certainly a compliment to Mrs. Rolfe's rooms, but what is it to Mrs. Rolfe's friends, Ruthie?" Mr. Scott said teasingly.

The color deepened in the girlish face, and Mrs. Rolfe came to her relief with the playful words, "You might tell him that it is just what some of Mrs. Rolfe's friends deserve for being such unmerciful teasers, Ruthie. But come, I have a new friend here, to whom I wish to introduce you." And she turned to John, who had been waiting quietly beside Mrs. Scott, an amused listener to the shuttle-cock of conversation that had been playing about him.

But Mr. Rolfe had anticipated his wife, and even as she spoke, he was saying, "My friend, Mr. Millington, my cousin, Miss Talbot, my friend, Mr. Thorn."

With quiet politeness John acknowledged the introductions. His first impressions of these two

new acquaintances were neither pleasant nor disagreeable, but totally indifferent ones. Miss Talbot was pretty, and Mr. Thorn gentlemanly, but they belonged to the great mass of human beings, who are, to superficial vision, simply commonplace. Neither attractive nor repulsive, such people meet and pass us every day, and our feelings towards them are stamped with calm indifference, until suddenly, it may be, and in some unexpected way, some lightning flash reveals to us the heart, that underneath the commonplace exterior is throbbing with hopes and fears, or loves and hates, peculiarly its own. And then, it may be, we are taught the solemn truth, that there is nothing so common that in God's hands it cannot be cleansed, and set apart for some beautiful or sacred use.

Quietly, through those two introductions, Mrs. Rolfe waited, while on the face of the young girl standing beside her, surprise, and doubt, and glad expectation were oddly blended.

"My friend, Mr. Millington, my cousin, Miss Selwyn," Mrs. Rolfe said, in the polite, but indifferent tone in which such introductions are usually given; but with unaffected pleasure the young girl extended her hand.

"O, John," she said in a voice that gave emphasis to her words, "I am so glad."

"So am I," John quickly answered, unmindful

in his pleasure and surprise of the interested eyes that were watching them. "I am very glad and very much surprised. You have almost taken away my breath, Ruthie," he added, forgetting for the moment the years that had passed since he last saw her, and speaking her name simply as he had done when she was a little child.

"And you didn't know me?" she asked, with a faint trace of reproach in her tone; "why, John, how could you help knowing me?"

"It is the fault of the years, not of my memory," he answered playfully; but with a full and sudden recognition of all the years had done, and also with a vivid consciousness of the eyes that were watching them.

Those eyes had watched them with expressions as various as were the characters of their owners, but now, in a voice at once curious and earnest, Mr. Rolfe said: "The question I want to ask, now, is a slight variation from the old one, 'when shall we three meet again?' and it is this, where have you two met before? Come, Ruthie, tell us where?"

Ruth Selwyn blushed and hesitated. Mr. Rolfe's question had suddenly reminded her that John's position in her father's family was very unlike the one he appeared to occupy at Solitude. In her home, he had been simply a poor boy, doing her father's errands, and though during his

last year with them, Professor Selwyn had treated him with great kindness and consideration, he had never stood in her father's parlor on the plane of social equality he appeared to stand on here. She did not know how sensitive he might be about having his early life referred to, and after a moment's pause she soberly answered: "I met Mr. Millington in Hancock, cousin William."

No one ventured to ask another question, and there the matter might have rested for the present, had not John's truthful conscience demanded that more should be told. He would have no false pretences in his life, and he was firmly resolved to make no attempt in the presence of the rich and influential to appear what he was not.

"I owe Miss Selwyn's father a debt I can never repay, Mr. Rolfe," he said, as he turned and looked at the gentleman with clear eyes that had nothing to conceal. "I was a very poor boy, struggling to acquire an education, and Professor Selwyn, in return for such service as I could render in his household outside of my school duties, gave me a home in his family, supplied me with books, befriended me when I was in difficulty, and made it possible for me to study at Hancock, until I was prepared for college. It is nearly five years since I left Hancock; but, Miss Selwyn," and John looked at the young girl with a smile that was full of feeling, "not a day passes

that I do not think of your father with increasing gratitude."

During this simple, but manly statement, John did not see the looks expressive of both admiration and appreciative sympathy with which Mr. and Mrs. Scott had listened to him, and neither did he observe the puzzled faces with which Mr. Thorn and Miss Talbot were regarding him. They could not understand the high motives that prompted him to break the silence about his past, which he might have maintained so easily. But John had not spoken with any thought of being either understood or admired; he had simply told the truth, because, to him, no other course was possible, and the consequences of that truth-telling he could safely leave with him who has promised to honor the truthful.

"And have you not seen the professor and Miss Ruth since you left Hancock?" Mrs. Rolfe asked, with the woman-like feeling, that if a story was good, she could not have too much of it.

"The professor two or three times at college," John quietly answered, "but not Miss Selwyn."

"And haven't you heard from them since you have been here; didn't you even know we were related?" Mrs. Rolfe continued to question curiously.

"My ignorance is to be pitied," John answered, with a smile, "for I knew nothing, Mrs. Rolfe."

Professor Selwyn, like Carlyle, believes that silence is golden, and consequently he seldom breaks that silence with a letter. I wrote to him last summer, before I thought of coming to Solitude, and I regret to say he has not yet favored me with a reply."

"Ah," Ruth said quickly, with an affectionate fear that her father might be misunderstood, "you must not judge of papa's friendships from either his spoken or his written words, Mr. Millington. If his letters to his friends are like angel visits, in their rarity and brevity, I think his thoughts of his friends are like angel thoughts in their charity and sincerity." The young girl's face flushed deeply, and the smiling eyes that watched her were full of sympathy and admiration.

"You are a faithful little champion, Ruthie," Mr. Rolfe said kindly, "and I think I would like to leave my cause in your hands when unable to defend it myself. I am not sure," he continued with a laugh, as he received a telegraphic communication from Mrs. Rolfe's eyes, "I am not sure, but I shall send you now to plead my cause with the cook. She will surely give us a cold supper if we keep her waiting much longer. Come, my friends, after this 'feast of reason and flow of soul,' let us have the 'cup that cheers, but not inebriates.'" And giving his arm to Mrs. Scott, Mr. Rolfe led the way to the dining-room.

It was a pure and peaceful atmosphere that enveloped Solitude the next morning. If the evening before had awakened, in thoughtful hearts, tender memories of the night, so long ago, when "the hopes and fears of all the years" met in star-lit Bethlehem, that morning, in its unclouded beauty, seemed full of glad reminders of the "love that encompasses the seen and unseen worlds and makes them one."

It was Sunday, as well as Christmas, and so, though Christmas gifts were numerous and Christmas greetings warm and sincere, there was no noisy or careless merriment. The family at Solitude attended church in the morning, and in the afternoon John led his little pupils to the library for the Bible reading that under his careful and intelligent teaching the boys voted the best of their lessons.

"Mayn't cousin Ruth come, too?" Will asked as they met the young girl in the hall.

"If she wishes," John quietly answered.

"Ought I to wish it?" Ruth asked with a smile and deepened color. "I am sure I would like to come, Mr. Millington, and yet, I do not want to if—if it would make any difference," she said with some timidity.

"It would make only a pleasant difference," John said, with a smile. "We study the Bible every Sunday at this hour, and in that study I do

not think there can be too many students, do you?"

Ruth did not say what she thought, but she followed her little cousins to the library, and seated herself near them, at a window that looked out on the beautiful ice-bound bay, that glistened like crystal in the brilliant sunshine. Quietly, as if she had not been present, John taught the little boys. It was a Christmas lesson, and the old, old story, that is still forever new, was told as only one who believed and rejoiced in it could tell it. Ruth listened to it in silence, but when John dismissed the boys, she suddenly spoke.

"Mr. Millington," she said, and her voice was low and troubled, and her eyes, turned towards the window, seemed to be following the flight of a sea-bird that skimmed over the water, making of the very resistance it encountered in the air a help to speed it onward, "Mr. Millington, do you think all Christians to-day feel as sure that God is their Father and Christ their Saviour as you seem to feel?"

John looked at her thoughtfully. As she sat there, she was very unlike the little girl who years before had studied with him in the long evenings in Aunt Phillis' kitchen. She had lost forever that child's face and form; had she lost that child's faith as well? He did not know, but he would try to learn.

“It is their privilege to feel so,” he answered quietly, “it is their birthright blessing.”

“Then why,” Ruth asked quickly, “why are they not happier?”

“I said it was their privilege,” John said gravely, “but I did not say they all claimed it, Miss Selwyn.”

“But that is just what I want to know,” Ruth said, and now she looked at him with a face that plainly revealed her anxiety; “why don’t they claim it, Mr. Millington, and—” and her voice fell to a whisper as she questioned—“how can they claim it?”

“Suppose,” John said, much as he was wont to speak to her when she was a child, “suppose a great gift had been promised you, and was waiting for you in the hands of the giver, would you not know how to claim it? Would you not, if you asked for it, feel sure that you would receive it?”

“Yes,” Ruth answered, a little sadly. “I know what you mean, Mr. Millington, but what one might ask without fear of an earthly friend, it seems hard to ask of God. He is far away, so infinite and omnipotent; how can we go to him, as to a father, feeling sure of his sympathy and love? How can we help”—and the young voice trembled as it spoke—“how can we help feeling afraid of him?”

“‘If you are afraid of God, fly to his arms,’” John softly quoted.

“We might, if we could only see him,” Ruth answered, in a choked voice.

Slowly John turned the leaves of his little Testament. “This is Christmas day,” he said, and with tender emphasis read the solemn words: “‘He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.’”

Ruth knew those words well, and yet as she listened to them now, it seemed as if she had never heard them before, so wonderfully did the precious truth, of which she was beginning to catch a glimpse, shine through and illuminate them.

“Jesus came to lead men back to the Father,” John said gently. “He came to show God’s erring, fearful children what that God was like—full of the tenderest love, the deepest compassion, the strongest helpfulness, the most far-reaching justice—that could give fair play to all, and that, seeing all our limitations, all our hindrances, and all our failures, could look upon us

“‘With larger, other eyes than ours,
To make allowance for us all.’

Christ lived upon the earth, and went in and out among men. Miss Selwyn”—and John’s voice was tremulous with deep feeling now—“it is you, not the Father, who are a long way off. It is you who must draw near to him, if you would know the preciousness of his love.”

Ruth turned a little and looked at John with eyes that made him think of their first Bible-reading.

"I want to do so," she said simply. "I hope I am a Christian, and I want"—and the stress upon the word told how great was the want—"to be a happy Christian, but you don't know, Mr. Millington, how hard, how very hard that drawing near is."

"Don't I?" John said, with a quick breath of sympathy. "Do you think you are the only one, Miss Selwyn, who has had first to endure the conflict before the victory could be won?"

Ruth did not answer, and in a moment John said gently, "There is a beautiful old Jewish proverb, Miss Selwyn: 'If you would be fragrant, keep near to the seller of perfumes.'"

Ruth's eyes brightened. "That is beautiful," she said, with quick appreciation of the lovely thought, "but still"—and the expressive face clouded again—"still the old, hard question presses for an answer—how can we keep near?"

"I might tell you, by prayer," John answered, with grave kindness, "but I know you pray. Suppose, instead, I say by taking the Christ, for whom there was no room in the inn, into your heart, and letting him abide there. I have somewhere read 'that ships that carry spices and aromatics become so saturated with the perfumes,

that their very decks and timbers are fragrant.' And I have seen, and I know"—and the young man's voice was strong as the truth he was uttering—"I know that when Christ dwells within a human soul, 'all heaven's own sweetness is about it thrown.'"

"It's growing dark," announced Jack, as at that moment he ran into the library, "and, Mr. Millington and cousin Ruth, mamma says, wont you come to the parlor? Aunt Wilma wants us to sing."

"Yes, I'll come in a moment," Ruth answered, and as the little boy ran off, she turned again to John.

"Mr. Millington," she said, in the frank and yet timid manner that had marked her childhood, "I wish—"

But the wish—which would have been an impulsive request that he would drop the dignified Miss Selwyn, that seemed to her like a fence built up between them—was never known; for before she could utter it, the door was opened and Miss Talbot appeared.

"Ruthie, you truant," she said, with a playful shake of her finger, "I have been looking for you up-stairs, and down-stairs, and in the lady's chamber, and as for poor Mr. Thorn, in spite of all my heroic efforts to be bright, I believe he thinks the sun is in an eclipse. Do come and try

to cheer him with a little of your sweetness and light." And drawing Ruth's arm through her own, the breezy young lady led her away.

Forgetful that he had been summoned to the parlor, John looked after the young girls until the door closed upon them, and then, with a very grave face, and a subdued manner that seemed to say that he, too, felt the need of sunshine, he reopened his little Bible.

CHAPTER XI.

SUGGESTIONS.

“Bits of gladness and of sorrow,
Strangely crossed and interlaid;
Noons of musing, nights of dreaming,
Words of love, and ways of strife;
Tears of parting, smiles of meeting,
Bits of smooth and rugged life—
These are the stones with which, O man,
Thou buildest, oft without a plan.”—*Bonar.*

“MR. MILLINGTON, Mr. Millington,” called Jack, when half an hour later he again thrust his curly head in at the library door, “wont you come? We are all waiting in the parlor, and *we* want you so much.”

“Are you sure your pronoun ought not to be I?” John asked, with a little tinge of sadness in his tone. But Jack had already run off, and very slowly John followed him.

“This is just the hour for music,” Mrs. Rolfe said, as he entered the parlor. “Come, Mr. Millington, I know you sing; I have heard you often with the boys, and I think Mr. Thorn does,” and she looked inquiringly at that young man, who was standing beside Ruth and looking through a photograph album with her.

“O ye—s, a little,” he answered indifferently, as if it was hardly worth while for him to even attempt to do anything very well.

“Well, every little is said to help, and so, perhaps, even your little will be of some assistance,” Mrs. Rolfe said, with not quite her usual gentleness.

“Julia”—and she turned to Miss Talbot—“do you sing much or little?”

“O, I try to do all things in moderation,” Miss Talbot answered, with her usual laugh.

“Very good. Ruthie, I can speak with certainty now—I am sure you sing.”

“I am afraid if you were in the witness-box it would not be safe for you to be so sure, cousin Emma,” Ruth said playfully, as she changed her seat for one near Mrs. Scott. “My only merit in music is that I am a good listener.”

“To love it well enough to listen to it is a greater merit than most people possess, if we may judge from the loud conversations and rude laughter we are forced to hear often at *musicales* and concerts,” Mr. Scott said gravely.

“To be a good listener to anything is a rare merit, I think,” Mrs. Scott said, in her gentle voice. “It involves a good deal of the charity—perhaps we might call it humility—that seeketh not its own. There is a line of Keble’s I often think of, Ruthie. I wonder if you know it:

“ ‘Give us grace to listen well.’

‘Grace to listen well.’ I suppose we rarely or never think to pray for that gift, and yet for want of that grace how much we often lose. But,” and Mrs. Scott’s serious tone changed to one that was almost playful, “I do not mean that you shall cultivate that grace by listening to my moralizing now. I am very anxious to hear Mr. Millington sing, for Jack has told me in confidence that he would ‘most rather hear him than sing himself.’”

There was a little laugh at this, and Mr. Rolfe, as he stroked his little boy’s head, said: “Considering how fond Jack is of the sound of his own voice, that is certainly a great compliment, Mr. Millington.”

“And one I fully appreciate,” John answered, with a smile; “but, before I appreciate it, I think you must listen to Jack.” And calling both of the little boys to the piano, John played a simple accompaniment, and led them in an easy Christmas song.

“I did not know you played, Mr. Millington,” Ruth said, in surprise, as the singing ceased and John turned from the piano.

“Nor do I,” he answered quietly. “In playing accompaniments I depend greatly upon my ear. While at college I devoted what time I could to studying the principles of music, but I

am no performer; I could never spare time for practice."

"Is it any satisfaction to understand the harmonies of music, if you cannot give them utterance?" Ruth asked doubtfully.

"I think it is," he said, in a thoughtful voice. "The pleasure one derives from even a little knowledge of music is very sweet and pure, and then it is certainly true of music, as of all other knowledge, that the more you know, the more influence you possess."

"Would you make the acquisition of influence a motive for study?" Mr. Rolfe inquired seriously.

John's smile was sweet as his words were earnest, as he answered: "Do you think a Christian can have too many arrows in his quiver, Mr. Rolfe? Do you think he can ever possess too much influence in this world, that he must struggle to regain for Christ?"

"No," Mr. Rolfe answered, "of course I do not, Mr. Millington. But—still—to tell a young student, 'the more you know, the more influence you will have'—although undeniably the truth—does seem to me a very selfish motive to set before him, and a dangerous one, when, look where we will to-day, we cannot miss seeing great power and influence selfishly used by their possessors for the accomplishment of their own ambitious purposes."

"You do not see consecrated influence so used," John said quietly.

"Consecrated is a word whose meaning the world has yet to learn," Mr. Scott gravely remarked.

"It will learn it, though, some day, from the lives that illustrate it," Mrs. Scott said, with a bright light in her face as she looked at John.

The young man's face was as bright as hers as he answered: "Some day I believe those dark places will all be illuminated, and it is for that reason that I would have a Christian many-sided, with all his powers symmetrically developed. Music, languages, literature, and art, knowing—as we do—what a power they are in the world, I would not have the world possess them alone. I would have the Christian know and understand them all, as far as possible, and then, upon all the power and influence thus gained, I would have him write the words the prophet of old saw engraven on the bells of Jerusalem—'Holiness unto the Lord.'"

"Go on," Mr. Rolfe said earnestly; "such consecration of purpose and of power does indeed give dignity to human life. Go on, Mr. Millington; inspire my boys with such motives and I shall be satisfied."

"All this time we are losing the pleasure of hearing Mr. Millington sing," Miss Talbot said

soon ; breaking, as she spoke, the silence that had fallen on the little company.

“That is a pleasure I do not want to lose,” Mrs. Scott said gently.

With the true courtesy—unfortunately seldom met with in singers—that is ready, without coaxing and urging, to do what it can for the pleasure of others, John turned again to the piano. The light of the beautiful Christmas day was waning now, and as the shadows darkened in the quiet room, the sense of loneliness that all day had saddened John’s soul grew deeper, and the sad, yet trustful hymn of Bonar seemed to give at once expression to his need, and with expression, peace, and full content. The hymn was one he loved, and to a slow, sweet, minor air he sang :

“ Amid the shadows and the fears
That overcloud this home of tears,
Amid my poverty and sin,
The tempest and the war within,
Weary, I cast my soul on thee,
Mighty to save even me,
Jesus, thou Son of God.

“ On thee I rest ; thy love and grace
Are my sole rock and resting-place.
In thee, my thirst and hunger sore,
Lord, let me quench for evermore,
Weary, I cast my soul on thee,
Mighty to save even me,
Jesus, thou Son of God.”

“Go on, please,” Mrs. Scott urged, as the singing ceased.

John's thoughts had passed to the great Father-love that provided the shelter ; and now, in the still twilight, hushing the secret unrest of every heart, came Faber's hymn to the Father :

“ All fathers learn their craft from thee,
All loves are shadows cast
From the beautiful, eternal hills,
Of thine unbeginning past.

“ There's not a craving in the mind
Thou dost not meet and still ;
There's not a wish the heart can have
Which thou dost not fulfil.

“ O little heart of mine, shall pain
Or sorrow make thee moan,
When all this God is all for thee,
A Father all thine own ? ”

The sweet notes filled the room and slowly died away, and a little hubbub succeeded, occasioned by a servant bringing in lights and tea ; but through it all Mrs. Scott rested on the sofa with her eyes shaded :

“ Give this to Mrs. Scott,” Mrs. Rolfe said to John, when he went to assist her in serving the tea and simple refreshments, that on Sabbath evenings were always taken informally in the parlor, and taking the cup the young man went to the sofa.

“ Mrs. Scott,” he said gently.

The hand that veiled her eyes was removed and

Mrs. Scott looked up with a smile that, though sad, was very sweet.

“Thank you,” she said, as she accepted the cup of tea. “I am glad you brought it, Mr. Millington. They are all served, I think”—and she glanced about the room. “Now, will you bring a cup for yourself, and sit here?” And she motioned to a chair beside her sofa.

Very willingly John obeyed. He could not explain Mrs. Scott’s influence over him; he had known her but twenty-four hours, and they had conversed very little, but he felt as sure of her sympathy as if he had known her twenty-four years. Words between them seemed very unnecessary; he did not care to talk, he was content to sit in silence beside her, and he started as if from a dream when she gently said:

“I must thank you for a very great pleasure, Mr. Millington, and far more than a pleasure. Your singing gave me comfort as well as enjoyment. And yet,” she added, in a half-inquiring tone, “those two hymns, though so beautiful, are not ones the young and happy would naturally select.”

John understood the question she would not directly ask.

“I am young,” he answered, in a low voice, “and I have much to make me happy, and yet the thoughts suggested by those hymns have often

quieted me, when it has seemed as if my whole soul was stirred and rebelling against my lot."

Mrs. Scott looked at him with wistful eyes.

"You have parents, I believe, Mr. Millington?" she said interrogatively.

John hesitated. Since he left Hermitsville for Hancock, nine years before, he had never alluded to his history. To do so would have been painful, and nothing had occurred to call for such allusion. He supposed—though in that supposition he was mistaken—that Mr. Crosby had informed Professor Selwyn of the mystery that enshrouded him, but by neither word nor act, through all these years, had any one reminded him of it, and in accordance with their earnest wish he still continued to call Mr. and Mrs. Millington father and mother, and in every way possible he was loyal to them as a son. But still he was not their son; no water of Lethe could make him forget that sorrowful fact; and now, though it pained him to do so, he felt that if he would be true he could give Mrs. Scott but one answer.

She was looking at him and waiting with evident interest for his words, and meaning, if she cared to hear it, to confide his whole story to her, he said, "I have"—dear friends who fill the place of parents—he would have added, but Mr. Scott suddenly interrupted him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but in this house-

hold, I believe, no one takes note of time but by its loss. The clocks are all out of order, Jack informs me. Mr. Rolfe's watch has run down, and mine, corrupted probably by an evil example, has done likewise; and so, my dear, I must appeal to you in this case—as in so many others—to set me right, and give me, if you can, the correct time.”

Smilingly Mrs. Scott gave the desired information; her husband lingered a few moments, chatting pleasantly about indifferent matters, and then left the room; but though Mrs. Scott resumed her conversation with John she seemed to feel no further interest in his family. He wondered a little at first how she had understood his words, and resolved to complete his sentence as soon as possible; but he found no chance to do so that night. The opportunity—which was perhaps one of God's occasions—had drifted by, and long months passed before it was referred to again.

“It always gives me pleasure to see children happy,” Mrs. Scott said, as her husband in leaving the room stopped to throw a handful of bonbons at Jack and Will, and was repaid by their glad shouts as they caught them, “and I believe in making Christmas the happiest day in the year for them. Have you any scruples about observing the twenty-fifth of December as the birthday of our Lord, Mr. Millington?”

“No,” he answered. “One day in the year I

think we ought most certainly to observe as the anniversary of that glad event, and it makes very little difference whether we have or have not the exact date. Though," he added with a smile, "it is a peculiar pleasure to me to believe this day the right one, for it is my own birthday."

"Your birthday, is it?" Mrs. Scott exclaimed, in a voice touched with some deeper feeling than mere surprise. "You cannot have seen a quarter of a century yet, Mr. Millington," and she smiled, though her tone was tremulous; "may I ask how old you are?"

"I am old enough to have learned and done a great deal more than I have, Mrs. Scott," he answered frankly. "I am twenty-two."

An expression of great pain flitted across Mrs. Scott's face; she was silent awhile; and then she said:

"This Christmas time, even while I rejoice to see others happy, is the saddest season of the year for me, Mr. Millington. Twenty-two years ago a great joy came to me at Christmas, but it was so soon followed by a great sorrow, that even the memory of the joy is now painful. Have you ever lost any one dear to you by death, Mr. Millington?"

"No," he softly answered.

"I hope you may long be able to say that," she said, in a voice that unshed tears made pathetic,

“but when that grief falls upon you, Mr. Millington, remember that death is not the heaviest loss the heart can feel, nor tears shed over a grave the bitterest tears that fall from human eyes. If I could only know that my—” She stopped abruptly. Voice and hands were alike trembling violently, and John gently took the cup she was still holding from her, and carried it to the little table at which Mrs. Rolfe was still presiding.

She detained him a few moments with offers of sandwiches and cake, and when he returned to his seat, he found that Ruth and Miss Talbot and Mr. Thorn had all yielded to the magnetism Mrs. Scott seemed unconsciously to exert, and drawn their chairs up very near her sofa.

“We felt obliged to come in self-defence,” Ruth said, at once shyly and playfully. “We don’t approve of monopolies where we are left out and derive no benefit, and we have all felt envious of the interesting conversation we could see that Mrs. Scott and you were enjoying, Mr. Millington.”

“Then I hope you have brought good materials for continuing it with you,” he said easily, as he sat down beside her.

“No, we have brought nothing but good desires,” Miss Talbot said, with the little laugh that belonged to her as much as its chirp belongs to the cricket.

“And our desire at present,” Mr. Thorn smil-

ingly explained, "is to be amused, Mr. Millington; so please do the best you can for us."

John smiled a little. "You make me think of the Philistines who demanded sport of poor blind Samson," he quietly answered.

Mr. Thorn regarded him with rather doubtful eyes.

"I am not quite sure how far your philosophy reaches, Millington," he said, "but you referred just now to that old Bible-story of Samson, and I am curious to know if you, a student in this enlightened nineteenth century, can believe such stuff."

"Stuff," John repeated, in a voice that made his hearers look at him in surprise. The word seemed to have escaped him involuntarily. He was silent a second, and then, in his usual quiet tone, he said, "I believe my Bible, Mr. Thorn."

"Do you?" Mr. Thorn asked, in a peculiar tone. "You don't think it a collection of ancient myths and allegories then, that wise men have tried to read spiritual meanings into?"

"I think it the word of God."

Mr. Thorn moved uneasily in his chair, and curled and uncurled the piece of paper he was holding in his hands several times, before he again looked up and said in a doubtful tone:

"You mean me to understand, then, that you believe all those strange and remarkable stories,

related in the Bible, could have actually occurred, do you?"

"Why could they have not?" John quietly questioned in his turn. "Given a Creator, possessed of infinite power and wisdom, would he not be able to do what he pleased with his own creations?"

"Oh—ah—ye—es," Mr. Thorn reluctantly admitted, "but you know, Millington, the philosophers tell us the universe is under the control of fixed laws."

"Fixed and unchangeable, so far as the philosophers are concerned, I grant," John gravely answered. "But I believe we will both acknowledge that all laws are subject to the will of their makers, and can be changed or repealed at their pleasure."

Mr. Thorn considered a moment. "Then," he slowly asked, "you believe that God rules this world according to his own will and pleasure, do you?"

"He doeth according to his will among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of earth," John reverently quoted.

"Why, then, if that is true, is evil in the world?" Mr. Thorn demanded quickly, with the air of one who felt sure he had thrown the stone that would crush the giant.

"What is it Dr. Holland says?" interposed

Miss Talbot now. "Isn't it that 'evil is only the slave of good?'"

Mr. Thorn made an impatient gesture. "He is a slave, then, who usurps his master's place pretty often," he said scornfully.

A sorrowful expression shadowed Mrs. Scott's sweet face. "Some day—when you are a Christian, Mr. Thorn"—she said gently, "you will understand how painful it is for God's children to hear their Father's goodness called in question."

The young man's scornful and almost defiant look softened. "I wish that some day might sometime come," he said, as he turned almost reverently to Mrs. Scott. "But I confess," he soberly continued, "that I find it hard to believe in a goodness that suffers evil to rage like an unchained beast in the world, or that leaves so many human beings to begin, and live, and end their lives in darkness. It's very useless to tell me it is a mystery. I know that only too well already. But I want light on the mystery before I can believe in a goodness that would permit it."

"Evil is in the world, but so is *God*," John said, in a voice that was at once emphatic and tender.

"Is that your creed?" Mr. Thorn asked, with a tinge of contempt in his tone. "Well, I endorse

the first part. I am not as sure as you appear to be about the last."

John suddenly turned and looked at his flippant questioner. There was a fire in his eyes now, and indignation and pity seemed struggling for the mastery in his voice as he asked :

"Do you know why you are not sure, Mr. Thorn? Do you know why you, and thousands of young men like you, can bear to sit to-day in luxurious seats and coolly question the goodness, the power, the very existence of the long-suffering and most patient God, who created you, and gave you the intellect you only use for his dishonor? Do you know why? Then, if you do, pray tell me."

There was something in John's words and tone that impressed Mr. Thorn and made him very uncomfortable, but he would not own, willingly, that he was touched, and with a laugh, that he meant should seem light and unconcerned, he answered :

"Why, really, Millington, you come down on a man like an iron-clad man-of-war on a poor sailing craft. When you are a judge, I would not like to stand at your bar to be sentenced."

John had a word to say, and he was not to be turned from his purpose.

"You have not answered," he said. "Tell me, do you know why?"

“Oh, well,” Mr. Thorn answered carelessly, “if Daniel has really come to judgment, I suppose I must speak, and I will tell you, frankly, it is so, I suppose, because we can see no good reason why it should be otherwise.”

“And you, a thinking man in God’s world, can tell me that?” John said in a low, almost stern voice.

“I cannot tell you more than I know myself,” Mr. Thorn returned, with some anger. “If, with your superior knowledge of human nature, you can tell me a better reason, why, I would like to hear it.”

“And for once, at least, in your life, you shall hear it,” John said in an earnest, but touched and almost tender voice. “It is because you have never given one hour’s serious thought to the great purpose for which your life was given you. It is because you have never wished to know more of God that you know nothing of him to-day. It is because you have never taken your place on God’s side in this world, and have thrown all the strength of your manhood into fighting with him, and for him, against the evil it pleases you to magnify, that you can doubt to-night the goodness of your Maker. Mr. Thorn,” and forgetful of other hearers, like one pleading with a brother John seemed to be pleading now, “Mr. Thorn, those who are willing to obey God, and do the

work he gives, never doubt his existence or his goodness."

Mr. Thorn was touched, but his proud will was not yet ready to yield. "I wonder," he said for the sake of argument, "I wonder how many others in this room have faith as strong as yours."

"I have," Mrs. Scott said solemnly. "I have tested the promises of my Bible in many a trying hour, Mr. Thorn, and I have found them always a precious pillow on which to rest an aching heart."

Mr. Thorn looked at her with something like reverence in his eyes, but he only said: "Excuse me, Mrs. Scott, but you are a woman; it is natural for women to believe. An unbelieving woman," and he turned to John, "always seems to me like a monstrosity in nature, a terrible mistake."

"And yet you despise their faith," John said.

"No; you misunderstand me. I do not despise; I simply cannot accept it; my reason rebels against it."

"Suppose, for reason, you say will," Mrs. Scott softly suggested; "would you not be nearer the truth?"

The young man hesitated. "Well," he said, in a moment, "suppose I grant that, what is gained, Mrs. Scott?"

“Much,” she gently answered. “Take now the next step, and yield that will in loyal submission to its King.”

“I cannot,” he said, a little fiercely.

“Ah,” Mrs. Scott said mournfully. “God does not shut the door of heaven upon us ; it is we who shut it, and standing without refuse to enter in.”

“I wish—” It was Ruth who spoke, in the impulsive and earnest way peculiar to her.

“What, Miss Selwyn ?” John asked gently.

She flushed a little, but her answer was frank, though her voice was tremulous—“That it was possible for us, while still in this world, to enter far enough inside that door to be really happy and satisfied.”

“That is just what I think,” Miss Talbot said now. “We are none of us happy and satisfied, and it seems useless to preach to others, and tell them to believe, when, all the while, we know—and they know, too—that though our faith may be strong enough to save us when we die, it is not strong enough to make us joyful while we live.”

“I believe you are right, Miss Talbot,” Mr. Thorn said, in a sober voice. “This is Christmas night. Now, if you asked me to tell you, in some familiar Bible-word, what seems to me to be the attitude of Christians, in this world that they profess to believe that Christ died to save, I

should answer you, not in the language of his disciples, but in the words of those unknown Gentiles, who were only seekers, you remember—‘We would see Jesus.’ It may be well to seek, but Christians, it seems to me, if their faith is true, ought to be sure that they have found. But they are not sure.”

A tiny sigh escaped from Ruth. John heard it, and as he watched the young girl’s thoughtful face, he said :

“You wrong the great multitude of believing hearts who to-night are singing, ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth,’ by your sweeping assertion, Mr. Thorn. If, here and there, Christians are walking in darkness, the fault is not in the hand that guides them, but in the feeble hold that they have taken of it. And to all doubtful hearts, I think, this one word should be said: ‘Go, work for the Master, and you shall soon enter into his joy.’”

There was a solemn pause, and when, in a few moments, Mr. Thorn spoke again, his tone was changed. “Suppose,” he said gravely, “suppose I am willing to work, what is my work?”

“This,” John answered, in a low, glad voice :

“‘To rise in strength, and cast the evil out
That slays the Christ-like in the human soul:
This is the work.’”

The door opened just then, and Mr. Scott came

in and approached the sofa. The little circle parted, but for one instant, as he was passing, Mr. Thorn paused by John.

“You have given me something to think of,” he said, in a low voice.

CHAPTER XII.

QUESTIONS.

“God holds the key to all unknown,
And I am glad.
If other hands should hold the key,
Or if he trusted it to me,
It might be sad.

“The very dimness of my sight
Makes me secure;
For groping in my misty way,
I feel his hand—I hear him say,
My help is sure.”—*Anonymous.*

HOLIDAY WEEK went by with the swift-ness with which pleasant times have an unfortunate trick of moving. The days were full of sunshine, of crisp winds that only invigorated, and of cold weather that stimulated to action and made walks and out-door exercises a positive delight.

Mr. and Mrs. Rolfe were constantly proposing plans for the amusement of their guests, and John found himself called upon frequently to play an active part in their entertainment. Naturally of a social and genial temperament, he enjoyed fully the pleasures offered him now, and yet, some-

times, he was conscious of glancing back wistfully to the old days when, in Aunt Phillis' kitchen, Ruth and he had been boy and girl together, and she had brought all her little confidences to him, and listened—with a faith that never doubted his ability to remove mountains—to all his boyish dreams for the future.

All that was changed now. He was Mr. Millington and she was Miss Selwyn: and there were others around her eager for her confidence, and others, perhaps, of whom she now dreamed and hoped great things for the coming days. The thought saddened him. That in this world he would never come out of the shadow that surrounded him, and ever find the family and relations whose name belonged to him he no longer dared to hope. And knowing well the spirit of the world, he knew that long years must pass before, by his own unaided efforts, he could win for himself the recognition that inherited honors so quickly command.

What then? Should he shut himself out from pleasant companionships, and, in sullen rebellion against the will of his Maker, refuse to take the good he offered him, because it was not altogether pure, but, like gold that is serviceable, mixed with alloy? No. "Tenacious of purpose" should still be his motto. He would stand in his lot. He would do his work truly and nobly as he could.

He would at least be worthy of happiness, and if it passed him by, he could wait; as those wait who know that time is short and eternity long, and believe that, behind all shadows, God is watching over and working for his own.

And so with pleasant, unclouded face he saw Ruth monopolized frequently by Mr. Thorn and Miss Talbot, and noticed the admiration and attention given her, and the innocent, girlish pleasure with which she received it. It was all right, he thought. Ruth was worthy of the best. Did she, or any woman, gain the best? Was the heart that owned no dependence upon God a safe heart for others to depend upon in time of sorrow and of trial? John sighed a little, as in one of his quiet hours these questions pressed for an answer.

Thus the days, with their pleasures and lessons, went by, until Saturday night came again, and with Saturday another friend to enjoy Mrs. Rolfe's hospitality.

"Miss Winthrop, the dearest friend of my school-days," Mrs. Scott said, when she introduced the new-comer to John, and John looked up to meet the scrutiny of a pair of eyes that were very free from color blindness, and that had the rare power of seeing things and persons as they were, and yet of looking upon them with charity and kindness.

“Wilma,” their owner said suddenly, in the course of that evening, while they were all assembled in the library, waiting, as Miss Talbot laughingly said, “to see the old year and the new year shake hands,” “Wilma, of whom does Mr. Millington remind you?”

A look, as if the question troubled her, crossed Mrs. Scott’s face, but she answered pleasantly, though evasively: “Now that I know him, I do not think he could ever remind me of any one but himself, Annie.”

“Is he so unlike ordinary humanity?” Miss Winthrop asked. “Well, he may be possessed of great individuality, but you are certainly very dim-sighted, Wilma, if you cannot see the resemblance I mean.”

“What resemblance?” Mr. Scott asked, as he caught Miss Winthrop’s last words.

“Why, the resemblance between yourself and Mr. Millington,” Miss Winthrop answered, with great earnestness. “If you could go back and stand as a young man beside Mr. Millington, I am sure you would be taken for brothers.”

“I have noticed that resemblance,” exclaimed Mr. Thorn.

“Why, yes, and so have I,” chimed in Miss Talbot and Ruth.

Mr. and Mrs. Rolfe remained silent, but Mr. Scott said very quietly:

“That would be a relationship in which any one might be proud to stand to Mr. Millington.” And then, as his eyes turned to his wife’s face and he noticed her sudden paleness, he hastened to say :

“Nature plays strange freaks sometimes in this very matter of resemblance, Miss Winthrop, and I have often amused myself with wondering what it means, when two strangers—as far removed from each other as it is possible for Adam’s descendants to be—show unmistakable signs of resemblance, in color, features and expression. Come, Miss Winthrop, you are a wise woman ; what does it mean ?”

“I am glad I am a wise woman,” Miss Winthrop answered smilingly, “for the wise are always humble enough to acknowledge ignorance, and you must not ask me to decipher hieroglyphics for you, unless you first give me the key.”

“You believe there is a key, then ?” Ruth asked, with interest.

Miss Winthrop smiled as she turned towards her. “Perhaps,” she said lightly ; “but it is a Rosetta stone, that I fear neither you nor I will ever find, dear child.”

“It would be interesting, though, in this particular instance, to try to find it,” Miss Talbot exclaimed. “Mr. Millington,” and she turned to John, “have you such a thing as a family tree ?

If so, I wish you would bring it, and let us see what remote ancestor you and Mr. Scott had in common."

John smiled, though the subject for him was a sore one. "Perhaps Japheth would answer as well as any one, Miss Talbot," he said quietly.

"Japheth," Miss Talbot repeated; "why, who was he?"

"I am afraid you don't know your Bible very well, Miss Talbot," Mr. Thorn said playfully. "Don't you remember Japheth, the son of Noah, who settled the islands of the sea? I suppose we all have a common ancestry from him, unless, indeed, Mr. Millington means that other Japheth, who went in search of a father. Do you?" and he turned with a laugh to John.

The thrust was accidental, but John winced under it. "No," he said briefly; "I had forgotten him."

"Such is fame," Mr. Rolfe said quickly, as if glad to change the subject. "Miss Winthrop, what is the use of you authors making books, when your only reward will be to be forgotten?"

"The use is not always apparent, I must confess," Miss Winthrop calmly replied. "Gold diggers, whether they toil with their brains or hands, too often fail in their endeavors."

"Does Miss Winthrop write books?" Ruth asked in a low tone of Mr. Thorn, who stood near her.

He nodded. "Aren't you afraid of her?" he whispered mischievously. "She will put you under her mental microscope, and analyze your nature minutely, only to portray it in her next book, as a good bit of character-drawing."

Ruth shrank a little at the mere suggestion of such an act. "I would not like to come too close to any one who would do that," she said, with some nervousness.

Mr. Thorn laughed. "Miss Winthrop," he said teasingly, "Miss Selwyn is afraid you will put her in your next book. Is there any danger of such a sad calamity befalling her?"

Miss Winthrop smiled as her kind eyes sought Ruth's crimson face and studied it a few moments. "There is no immediate danger," she said lightly. "I will wait a few years and see what Miss Selwyn makes of her possibilities."

"You are quite safe for the present then, Miss Selwyn," Mr. Thorn said reassuringly to Ruth. "But now, Miss Winthrop, I would really like to be immortalized, and since I despair of ever achieving immortality for myself, won't you have compassion on me and give me a place in your book?"

"You?" Miss Winthrop asked meaningly, as she turned from Ruth to the young man. "No; excuse me, I don't think I will."

"Ah, you have given me now the unkindest

cut of all," Mr. Thorn laughingly persisted. "Why will you be so cruel, Miss Winthrop?"

"Must you know the reason?" she said pleasantly, but with evident meaning. "Well, then, understand that you are altogether too commonplace. The world has enough commonplace characters in it; it is not necessary to perpetuate them in books."

"There, Miss Winthrop," Mr. Scott said, in a kind but serious tone; "if I had been called upon to criticise your writings, your lack of commonplace characters is the very defect I would have pointed out. Because the world is full of commonplace people seems to me the very reason why you should describe them. As it is, you make your heroines all angels—minus the wings—and your heroes stand on a plane so far above the level of ordinary humanity, that we look up to them in blank despair. You hold up too high a standard, my friend."

"Do I?" Miss Winthrop said, with composure. "It does one good, sometimes, to be forced to look above the ground and behold the stars, Mr. Scott."

"A lady's word must not be disputed," he answered playfully.

"You mean—in this case—that it cannot be," she retorted. "Now"—she continued seriously—"please listen to me, and let me plead my own defence. My aim has never been simply to

describe the people we see every day. Character-drawing is a rare gift, but to make it a useful one you need, when you have drawn your character, to place it—as an art-student does his picture—beside a higher one and let the contrast teach its lesson. While I enjoy the good—so called—society novels, I have never felt anxious to write them. I have wanted, with the little gift for writing that I possess, to do good.’”

If Miss Winthrop’s defence did not acquit her, it at least silenced her critic: but now Mr. Thorn, who was still smarting from her words, said scornfully:

“With such ideals as Miss Winthrop has, I wonder that she ever condescends to mingle and associate with poor, ordinary, human beings like ourselves.”

“Ah,” and Miss Winthrop turned quickly to the young man. “Did I say that I despised commonplace people? Mr. Thorn, that is the way you have chosen to interpret my words, but it is not the truth. I have no contempt. I have instead a sense of oneness with and likeness to them, that makes me ever conscious that when judging them I am condemning myself: and I never hold up an ideal without seeing, with painful distinctness, how far, how very far, I am from having attained it myself.”

Miss Winthrop’s tone was touched with sadness,

and Mrs. Rolfe said: "I do not think any one can justly accuse you of feeling superior to others, or of judging them uncharitably, Annie."

Miss Winthrop's smile and voice were both thoughtful as she said, "This is New Year's eve. It is a good time for us, like Pharaoh's butler, 'to remember our faults,' and I must own that naturally I believe it is my character to be severe and exacting in my judgments of others."

"What is that thought of Farrar?" asked Mr. Scott. "Isn't it to this effect, that people with high ideals are apt to be hard in their judgments?"

"Yes," Miss Winthrop answered, "I remember that thought, but the fact that our ideal is high, while it may explain our hardness, does not excuse it."

"I knew a man once who carried a yard-measure in his pocket, and always, when possible, wanted to measure his friends and learn their height," said Mr. Thorn now, "and I think some people carry mental yard-measures, and are constantly measuring the abilities and attainments of their friends."

"Well," laughed Ruth, "is there any harm in that, if they give good measure?"

"No, not if they do, perhaps," Mr. Thorn said, "but that, Miss Ruth, is something like the height considered most desirable for a man. The most of us unfortunately fall short of it."

"Pardon me," John said gently, "but, even when we give good measure, I am afraid measuring other people is a dangerous amusement, and one that has a tendency to make us like 'the stand-aside-I-am-holier-than-thou Pharisee' mentioned in the Talmud. We are very ready to be blind to our own short-comings, and equally ready to be far-sighted where the failings of our neighbors are concerned. And the eyes that are quick to discern flaws and faults, are very apt to grow sharp and uncharitable."

"But we are not required to call black, white," Miss Talbot said now.

"No," Miss Winthrop answered, "nor, always, my dear, to assert that black is black."

"What then?" Ruth asked. "If Emerson is to be believed, eyes are made for seeing, Miss Winthrop."

"Veil them with charity," she gently answered; "the light is softer, then."

"Ah," Ruth said, in the quick way peculiar to her, when deeply in earnest, "if we only could. But veils of charity are not woven in earthly looms, you know, Miss Winthrop."

"And yet they may be had for the asking," Miss Winthrop answered, in her thoughtful voice. "My dear," she said in a moment to Ruth, who, in her interest, had come close to her, "instead of talking any longer in metaphors, let me give you

a little leaf from my own history. It may help you. Sometimes I think that is one reason why bitter experiences are sent to us, that, taught by them, we may be able to strengthen those who have not yet passed the way through which we have already journeyed."

Ruth nestled close to her kind friend's side, and in a voice, meant only for her, Miss Winthrop continued:

"It was years ago, my dear. I was young and impulsive, full of high aspirations for myself, and sadly prone to demand the superlative degree of goodness from my friends. Like Mr. Thorn's acquaintance, I was very apt to carry and use a yard-measure. And, as Mr. Millington suggested, I failed in using it: for, though my measuring might be just, it invariably fell short of being charitable. And oh, my dear," and Miss Winthrop's voice trembled a little, "think where we would be, if he who knows our frame was only just, but not merciful and compassionate also."

"May I sit here?" John asked, at that moment, as he placed his hand on a chair just opposite Ruth and near Miss Winthrop.

She smiled and gave the desired permission, and then went on with her story.

"My measuring yard had been for some time in constant use, when there came a new teacher to our quiet town. I welcomed her coming. I

believed at first that she had quite attained all things that were true, and lovely, and of good report, and I thought her influence would tell powerfully for all that was beautiful and good among us."

"Well," Ruth asked, with great interest, as Miss Winthrop paused.

Miss Winthrop sighed a little. "It was not well, my dear. Very soon I heard reports of her past life that were very much to the discredit of that young teacher. I could not doubt what I heard; it was too well substantiated. Sorrowful mistakes and failures had marked her early years. And then, instead of exercising a little of the charity that suffereth long and is kind, instead of hoping that, of her failures, she was building that beautiful ladder St. Augustine and Longfellow tell us of, I withdrew my confidence, I no longer gave her my support; from being an earnest friend I became a critical and—worse—a condemning judge."

"I don't see how you could have done otherwise," Ruth said impulsively. "How could you help feeling that you had been deceived?"

"I could have helped being uncharitable in my thoughts and words about her," Miss Winthrop answered. "I was not called upon to untomb her past. I might, at least, have judged her by myself, and believed that where she had erred, she

had also repented. I might have believed—when all her deeds confirmed it—in her present sincerity, and, above all, I might have remembered that the judgment-seat was not for me, and I might have been patient, and, like charity, hoped and prayed all good things for her future.”

“How did it end?” Ruth asked now, for Miss Winthrop had paused as if she had finished her story. “Were you ever friends again?”

Miss Winthrop sighed. “I learned humility and charity after a long struggle,” she said, “and I ceased at last to demand impossible goodness from her or any one. She did not remain long in our village. She went her way in the world, and for years she has been a faithful laborer in a far-off portion of our Master’s vineyard. I see her name sometimes in the reports of Christian workers, sometimes a word comes to me from herself, and I know that she has done her life-work well, and that when she lays it down, it will be to receive a merited reward. The hardness on my part that made her heart ache once, she long ago forgot, but I can never recall that period of my life without sorrowful regrets. I have told you of this—one of my many failures—in the hope that it will remind you to be careful how you measure others by any standard of your own, and lead you to covet still more earnestly God’s best gift, of the charity that thinketh no evil.”

"I came across a thought something like this," John said soon, breaking the thoughtful silence that had followed Miss Winthrop's last words: "'he who is unforgiving and uncharitable in his judgments, breaks the only bridge by which he can himself go to heaven.'"

"Ah," Miss Winthrop said, with moistening eyes, "it is much to know the truth, but they only are happy who do it."

"Emma," Miss Winthrop asked, an hour later, when all had left the library save herself and Mrs. Rolfe, "Emma, what do you know of that Mr. Millington?"

"Know of him?" Mrs. Rolfe echoed, "Why, enough to trust him implicitly, Annie."

"Yes, I know. I don't mean that," Miss Winthrop answered hurriedly. "What do you know of his family? Has he a father?"

"Oh, yes; I have heard him speak of his father several times."

Miss Winthrop still looked dissatisfied.

"I am peculiar," she said slowly, "but I cannot help believing that there are earthly reasons for a great many things we are inclined to attribute solely to spiritual influences. Now Mr. Scott may be right in thinking that resemblances between strangers are due to mental and spiritual affinities only. But, if I were he, I would, in this particular case at least, inquire well into the hap-

penings and workings of this mundane sphere we live in, before I went off into speculations about the far-off and unknown."

"Don't," Mrs. Rolfe exclaimed earnestly, "for sweet pity's sake, don't suggest such a thought to them, Annie: when a wound is healing, it is cruel to probe it."

"I won't hurt them," Miss Winthrop answered, "but for years I have dreamed that some day I should unravel this mystery, and so"—she added slowly—"I expect truly to do before I die. Is Susie still in the asylum?" she asked, after a little silence.

"Yes," Mrs. Rolfe answered briefly.

"And Francis, where is he? Have they ever heard from him since he went off?"

"Never. They believe that he is dead."

"I believe they take too much for granted," Miss Winthrop said, a little impatiently.

"I believe they have learned submission," Mrs. Rolfe replied, "and I am glad if they have finally abandoned hope. To hope for what is impossible is only cruel torture, Annie. Don't you think Wilma seems brighter than when you saw her last?"

"If she does, it is a brightness that owes its light more to heaven than to earth," Miss Winthrop answered sorrowfully.

"I think it does her good to be surrounded by

young people," Mrs. Rolfe continued. "She is very fond of Ruth, and I think she is much pleased with Mr. Millington."

"Pleased," Miss Winthrop repeated; "well, truly, she would be too fastidious for this world if she were not. You say he has a father, do you? Of course you know, and still I find it hard to believe you. I did think that, like an Indian, I had found a trail at last. If I were superstitious I should say that I had had a revelation this evening; but I suppose, after all my fancies, that I am only a silly dreamer, and I believe I will go to bed. But, remember"—she added, as she went towards the door—"remember, I never have given and I never shall give up hope, and, if this world lasts and I live, I expect to ferret out the truth yet."

"If you do," Mrs. Rolfe answered, "book-writing will not be your best work, Annie. Good-night."

CHAPTER XIII.

SERMONS.

“Like warp and woof all destinies
Are woven fast,
Linked in sympathy like the keys
Of an organ vast,
Pluck one thread, and the web ye mar;
Break but one
Of a thousand keys, and the paining jar
Through all will run.”— *Whittier*.

PEACEFULLY dawned the new year for the little company at Solitude. If, standing on its unknown threshold, each heart felt the pressure of hopes and fears peculiar to itself, no words revealed it, and with the utterance of the first good-morning wishes the new year took its place, and, without any outward change, life went on under the new reign even as it had under the old.

That first day of the year was also the first day of the week—a fitting time for memory to glance backward, while hope looked forward—but it was very cold; a wind that had been cradled among icebergs blew from the north, gray storm-clouds hung low, and ever and anon great flakes of snow drifted down, and seemed, as they lighted here and

there, like the advanced guard of the fierce storm the voices of the air proclaimed upon its way.

Under such circumstances a ride of five miles, to the nearest church, was not thought advisable for either people or horses; and about church time several of the family gathered in the library, and looked disconsolately from its windows.

“What shall we do with ourselves?” Miss Talbot asked gloomily. “In such an atmosphere, and under such a mournful sky as this, I feel as if I were breathing under a pall. Ruth, you usually have some sunshiny resources for such days as this; so do propose something now to brighten us up.”

“Suppose we have a reading,” Ruth suggested. “I remember that I used to like to hear Mr. Millington read: we might ask him to read us a sermon now, since we cannot go to church.”

“A sermon,” Miss Talbot ejaculated. “Oh, well,” she added in despair, “do ask him, if you please. With a snow-storm without, and a sermon within, things will at least be harmonious. That they should be agreeable is of secondary importance.”

A little disturbed by Miss Talbot’s words, Ruth made no move to act upon her permission, but now Miss Winthrop spoke.

“I think your suggestion a very good one, my dear,” she said cheerfully to Ruth, “and I will

ask Mr. Millington myself." And going to the parlor where John sat reading, she soon returned with him.

"What style of sermon do you want?" he asked pleasantly, as he went to one of the bookshelves.

"Oh, anything will answer that has firstly, secondly, and thirdly in it," Miss Talbot answered, with indifference. "A sermon's a sermon, and it doesn't matter much, to me, what it's about. I sit through sermons, just as I sit through interviews with uncongenial people—from a sense of duty—and I think my own thoughts, generally, and pay little attention to the speaker's."

John made no reply to the young lady's frivolous words. Passing them by, in a silence that annoyed her far more than a scornful remark would have done, he turned to Ruth.

"And you, Miss Selwyn?" he briefly asked.

She hesitated a moment, but then she said: "I do not like sermons that attempt to prove that the unanswerable questions of the Bible have been all answered and settled for us by men, whose opinions we are bound, in duty, to receive as infallible and unquestionable. Such sermons—like the good books Mrs. Browning speaks of—often make me feel 'athirst by suggestion.' I don't want 'views,' I want helps," she added.

"And you, Mr. Thorn?"

“Oh, anything intellectual and eloquent will satisfy me,” that gentleman answered carelessly. “I may neither care for nor believe the text, but when it is treated eloquently, I can listen, just as when a boy I used to take bitter medicine for the sake of the sweetmeats in which it was carefully concealed.”

“I am easily pleased,” Miss Winthrop remarked now, as John looked at her. “To me a good sermon is always stimulating and suggestive. Only give us a strong text, Mr. Millington. I never like the trumpet to give an uncertain sound at the beginning.”

John smiled as, taking down a book, he came to a seat near the little group in the window.

“Here is a sermon that ought to satisfy Mr. Thorn,” he said, “for its author’s name is almost a synonym for intellect and eloquence. As for Miss Talbot, since she can exist more happily without than with thought, I suppose I need not consider her taste; but I think Miss Selwyn will like it, and the text—at least—will fulfil Miss Winthrop’s requirement;” and he slowly read, “‘If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.’”

“Yes,” Miss Winthrop said, as she settled herself comfortably in her chair, “that is strong and unshakable as Gibraltar.”

The sermon was strong and eloquent as the

strength of a great intellect and the power of a mighty faith could make it. Even Miss Talbot felt its force, and when the reading ended a thoughtful silence followed, but soon Mr. Thorn spoke.

“I wish I could believe as that writer does,” he said, in a serious voice. “The belief of a great intellect is entitled to respect and consideration; but you see, Millington, my difficulty is just here: I look about me and I see, on the one hand, the great mass of people going their own way, doing their own wills, and seeking their own pleasure, or happiness, or honor, with no thought of self-denial for the sake of One above themselves. And then, on the other hand, I see a little company of—enthusiasts, I believe the world calls them—who believe that Christ is all the Bible declares him to be, and believe also, that he calls them to follow him, and obey his will, and serve him as his servants, and seek first his kingdom and his honor; and I am puzzled to decide which is right, the world or the enthusiasts, and end by staying with the world, because—I suppose—my strongest inclinations draw me to it. And then, you cannot deny but what it has the weight of numbers and popularity.”

“Nevertheless,” John said gravely, “the enthusiasts are right.”

“If I could believe so,” Mr. Thorn began, and then he exclaimed abruptly—“See here,

Millington, what do you do, then, with the great company who are not enthusiasts. Do you condemn them all?"

“ ‘ The judgment-seat is not for me,
Its verdicts are not mine.
And the eyes that shall fix the praise or blame
See farther than mine or thine, ’ ”

John slowly repeated.

“ You are trying to maintain a neutral position, when—all the while—you know you have a decided opinion,” Mr. Thorn said impatiently. “ Millington, tell me—I am in no trifling mood—what do you think ? ”

“ I think,” John said, in a quiet but impressive voice, “ that if we could look beneath the surface, and know the inner life of the people around us, who seem to us so careless and unconcerned, we would find, many times, that the sacred fire of love to Christ, though burning very low in their hearts, has never gone quite out. But I also think ”—and now John’s eyes looked full at Mr. Thorn—“ I also think, that such people fail, sorrowfully and censurably, in giving loyal service and honor to their King. And there, I think, is where you likewise fail, Mr. Thorn.”

The words were plain and searching, but a yearning love for an immortal soul shone through them, and Mr. Thorn could not take offence.

“Convince me,” he said, “that Christ is truly all that you believe. And then—your faith shall be mine.”

“Words will never convince you,” John answered slowly. “It is only those who seek to do Christ’s will who know his preciousness.”

“And you believe,” Mr. Thorn continued to question, “you firmly believe that Christ is the only way to heaven?”

“‘There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved,’” John reverently quoted. Mr. Thorn looked troubled, but did not speak, and in a minute John asked: “Have you ever read the old tradition of the corner-stone of the temple, Mr. Thorn?”

“No,” Mr. Thorn answered indifferently. “I know very little about that old temple, but I believe it was considered a type of Christ, was it not?”

“Of Christ and of his church,” John explained.

“Yes,” Miss Winthrop remarked. “I remember once hearing an earnest preacher say, that ‘the walls of the temple were all ablaze with Christ.’”

Ruth’s face lit up, as it always did when a suggestive thought was given her, but John went quietly on.

“You remember how those wonderful stones were all hewn and chiseled in distant quarries, and brought to the temple-court polished, and

ready to be fitted into place without the sound of hammer or other tool. Among them—so the old legend runs—was one stone that the workmen rejected: they saw no need of it, and found no place for it; but with the other stones they worked, and out of them they tried to rear the glorious temple the king had ordered them to build.

“With careful painstaking they wrought, but wrought in vain, for the corner-stone was wanting. At last, when all other efforts had proved fruitless, they turned to the rejected stone. It fitted: and with it in its place—and only then—they could complete their work. The stone which the builders rejected had become the head-stone of the corner.

“Shall I read you the sermon in that stone?” John asked, as he met Mr. Thorn’s eyes. “The character that would abide God’s tests, the soul that would know itself safe, must build upon Christ, as the chief corner-stone. There is no other foundation.”

Mr. Thorn looked fixedly at John a moment, and then, without a word, arose and left the room. Miss Winthrop and Miss Talbot soon followed, and only Ruth remained behind.

“Mr. Millington,” she said, with some timidity, “may I ask a very impertinent question?”

“If you can,” he said, as he turned to her with

the same bright smile he had often given her in Aunt Phillis' kitchen.

That smile was evidently very reassuring, for Ruth said quickly, "Ah! you do not know how far my ability extends in that direction."

But then her face and voice changed, and she said soberly, "I want to ask this question, Mr. Millington—are you satisfied with yourself?"

If Ruth had only known the pain her simple question gave—it was not answered immediately, and when it was, John only said:

"Not with myself, but fully with my King."

"And do you believe that he is satisfied with you?" Ruth asked again.

John looked at her a moment, and then, as he understood the secret thought that had prompted her question, he asked:

"If you possessed a gem that was very rough, and shone with dim or scarcely any light, would you be satisfied with it, Miss Selwyn?"

"Why, no, of course not," she quickly answered. "I should want it cut and polished, until its utmost beauty and perfection were revealed."

"And still, even when it was roughest, you would love and prize your gem because of the beauty that, though hidden, you believed possible for it, would you not?"

"Yes," she answered, in a low tone.

He looked at her with a smile, and his voice

was very gentle as he said, "You have read my parable, I think."

Ruth's eyes were cast down, and when, in a minute, she raised them and spoke, her voice was very humble. "Mr. Millington," she said, "I know what you mean. I think there are many Christians who are like gems in their natural state, precious, though unpolished; but I do not dare to think of myself as such a gem, and often it seems to me almost incredible that my Saviour should love me, or care to make me perfect; and yet, I do want—before everything else—to belong to Christ, and I do want him to make me all I ought to be. Can you tell me"—and she looked at John as she had often when a child—"can you tell me what my trouble is? what holds me back?"

"I think," John answered gently, "that you think too much of your own weakness, and not enough of your Saviour's power. Remember, it is not your goodness, but his that saves you."

"I know that," she said humbly, "but I know, too, that I ought to be better than I am, and sometimes nothing expresses my feelings so fully as this old Episcopal collect—do you know it?—'Through my sins and wickednesses I am sore let and hindered in running the race set before me.'"

A few tears fell as Ruth ended her sad confes-

sion, and knowing that she was one who needed comfort and encouragement as well as counsel, John said kindly, as if speaking to the little Ruth of other days: "There is always sunshine where there are shadows, Miss Selwyn. Have you never noticed that when the sunbeams are brightest in our rooms, we see the specks of dust plainest?"

Ruth's face showed that she was following his thought, but she did not speak.

"I think," John gently continued, "that we may learn a beautiful lesson from that little fact, Miss Selwyn, for nature is full of types, if we will only read them."

She sighed even while she smiled.

"I am afraid I can read in it only this: that even as I would free my room of dust, so my heart must be cleansed of its sins," she said softly.

"We all need constantly to remember that," John answered gravely, "but sometimes we need to take the encouragement and comfort of this other truth: that, as only the sunshine can reveal the dust, so it is only when our hearts are softened and touched by the Spirit's influence—only when he is taking of the things of Christ, and showing them to us—that we feel the imperfections of our own lives, and the sinfulness of our own souls."

Ruth's face was still shadowed.

"I have never dared to comfort myself with such a thought," she said humbly.

"You may take the comfort of it," he answered, "if you will only remember that the times when you feel most deeply your need of Christ, are the very times when he waits to satisfy that need."

Just then Mr. Rolfe and his brother-in-law, followed by the two little boys, entered the library, and, wishing to be alone, John went out.

"Cousin Ruth," cried Will, "I want to know something. Did you come over in the Mayflower?"

"Why don't you ask if she didn't come down on a sunbeam?" Mr. Scott said laughingly. "She might have done the one as easily as the other."

Will looked a little puzzled. "Is it as great an honor to descend from a sunbeam as from the Mayflower?" he asked seriously.

"Quite as great, if it were possible," Mr. Scott answered dryly.

"The Mayflower crossed the ocean more than two hundred years ago, Will," Mr. Rolfe said now, "so how could cousin Ruth have come over in her?"

Will fell back on his favorite method of self-defence. "You know what I mean," he insisted. "Did her ancestors come over in her?"

"You are beginning rather early to be interested in ancestry," Mr. Scott said. "Pray, what has turned your attention to that subject?"

“Oh,” Will explained, “I heard Miss Talbot talking to Mr. Thorn just now, and she said somebody’s ancestors came over in the Mayflower, and so it didn’t matter much what he said or did, his family would admit him anywhere.”

Mr. Scott frowned angrily. “What outrageous nonsense people, who are supposed to be possessed of common-sense, do utter sometimes,” he said severely, “and with what false and dangerous ideas they fill young minds.”

“Why, isn’t it true?” Will asked. “Isn’t it a good thing to have ancestors?”

“It is a much better thing to have character, my little son,” Mr. Rolfe said kindly.

“Miss Talbot said our family tree would be a great help to Jack and me when we were men,” Will said, in a moment.

“God’s blessing, and your own endeavors, will be much greater helps,” Mr. Scott answered. “Listen, Will,” he continued gravely, “young as you are, I believe it will be well for you to have a clear understanding of this subject now. It is a good thing for a man to have an honorable old name, and a noble old family history, when, at the same time, he has the courage, honor, and resolution that would make a name and found a family for himself if he were not born to them. But, if he wants the will and ability, by honorable work, to make a name and a place for himself in the

world, then his old name, and his old family, can no more make a noble man of him, than veneering can make pine wood real mahogany."

"Then, don't you want me to be proud of my name?" Will asked doubtfully.

"I would much rather have you feel responsible for it," Mr. Rolfe answered seriously. "If you have a name to be proud of, Will, it is only because those who bore it before you were true and faithful men, who suffered no stain to come upon it. And now it is your duty to prove that you are worthy of it, not by boasting of, or resting upon it, but by so living that you will add new honor to it."

"That is what Mr. Millington is doing, I guess," Will said, with a wise shake of his little head.

"O, uncle," he continued, as, standing beside Mr. Scott, his bright eyes rested on a seal attached to his watch-chain, "do you know that Mr. Millington has a motto, and it is just like yours?"

"Like mine?" Mr. Scott asked, in surprise. "Are you sure, Will?"

"If I am not, I will be," Will said, in his most decided manner, and running out of the library, he went in search of John.

"Mr. Millington," he said, when he had found him, "may I take your seal? I want to read the Latin on it."

John smiled. "You will not find your read-

ing very laborious, Will, for it is only two words," he said, "but you can puzzle over it as long as you like." And grasping the seal, Will hurried back to his uncle.

"I've got it," he announced, "and it's just as I said, uncle; it's *Te-nax pro-positi*. Now, isn't that like yours?"

"Yes," Mr. Scott said; "it is my family motto, Will. I wonder," he added, after a little thought, "how Mr. Millington came by it."

"I know," Ruth said, from the window where she was still sitting. "He told me once that a minister, who was very kind to him, told him to choose it for his motto, and be true to it."

"Mr. Millington has parents living, has he not?" Mr. Scott asked now.

"I think so," Mr. Rolfe said, and Ruth added:

"Oh, yes, I have seen his father, old Mr. Millington, and papa said he was one of nature's noblemen; he was so true, and honest, and thoroughly good."

"I can readily believe that of Mr. Millington's father," Mr. Scott said gravely.

Nothing more was said at that time, but later in the day, when the family gathered in the parlor, some one asked, "Where is Mr. Millington?"

"I can tell you," volunteered Jack; "he is studying his Bible. He does so much Bible-studying every Sunday," he gratuitously explained.

"Whatever he attempts, I believe he is bound to accomplish ; his motto is certainly well chosen," Mr. Rolfe said pleasantly to Mr. Scott.

Will caught the remarks. "Mamma," he exclaimed, "don't you think it very strange? Mr. Millington's motto is just like uncle's."

"What is it, Will?" Miss Talbot asked. "I am always interested in family mottoes."

"*Tenax propositi*," Will answered, a little proud to pronounce the Latin words, "and it means, 'tenacious of purpose.' That's a good motto, isn't it?"

"Yes, very," Miss Talbot answered.

"How did he come by it?" Miss Winthrop asked, in a quick, almost sharp voice.

"Oh, by mere accident," Mr. Rolfe explained carelessly. "He chose it when a boy, Miss Ruth says, and his choice seems to have been one of the unconscious prophecies we read about sometimes."

Just then a sigh from Mrs. Scott caused her friends to turn towards her. She looked pale, and, saying quickly, "This room is very warm," Mr. Scott led her away.

"Ruth," Miss Winthrop asked that evening, when she found the young girl alone in the library, "Ruth, what do you know of Mr. Millington's family?"

"I know that he has a father, and a mother, and five brothers and sisters," Ruth answered.

“You are sure? you don’t think you can be mistaken?”

“No, certainly not,” Ruth answered, to the last question. “I have known about his family ever since I have known him.”

“Then how did he come by that motto, I’d like to know,” Miss Winthrop said, in a doubtful voice.

“Why, I don’t think his having that at all strange,” Ruth innocently explained. “When he was a young boy he was very anxious to have a thorough education, but he was poor and could have one only through his own exertions, and just about the time he began to study at Hancock he found that motto, and it expressed so perfectly what he felt he must be, if he would accomplish anything good and great in his life, that he resolved to take it for his own, and try, with all his might, to adhere to it. And I think he has done so, don’t you?” she added lightly.

Miss Winthrop did not answer, and Ruth soon went in search of her younger friends. Left alone, the older woman sat for awhile in deep thought.

“Well,” she said, at last, “he has parents, and brothers, and sisters; that fact seems established on too firm a foundation to admit of my doubting it; and, of course, it is not strange that that motto should have pleased an ambitious boy. It is all simple and clear as sunlight; and yet the sunlight

can be broken into colors, and I am all the time possessed by a strange fancy that these facts, that look so plain, might be explained by other facts that would change them greatly. But I suppose it is useless to let imagination work in that direction any longer. No matter whether it pleases or displeases you, if a thing is true, you cannot change it, and it is the wisest course to accept what is, and not think too much of what might have been. But, oh dear," the good lady sighed, while she rubbed her eyes, as if to brush away some film that hindered clear vision, "I do wonder if I ever will—as an Indian would say—find the right trail."

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFIDENCES.

“Wherever in the world I am,
In whatsoe’er estate,
I have a fellowship with hearts,
To keep and cultivate,
And a work of lowly love to do
For the Lord on whom I wait.”

—*Miss Waring.*

THE pleasant holidays were past, and on Monday the visitors, who, for a week, had made Solitude so unlike its name, took their departure.

“Good-bye, Mr. Millington,” Mr. Scott said warmly. “Meeting you has given us great pleasure, and remember, whenever you are in the city, you will find friends at our house.”

“Yes,” Mrs. Scott added gently, “a warm welcome will always await you there, Mr. Millington, and you will promise me to claim it, will you not?”

Gratefully John gave the desired promise, and with keen regret he looked after his new friends as the carriage bore them away. How or why it was he could not explain; other strangers had noticed him kindly, but none had ever impressed

him like Mr. and Mrs. Scott, and he felt that his life would be the richer for having known them, and that, however cold the world in the future might seem to him, their memory would always be a warm and softening influence in his heart.

That afternoon—moved by some strange impulse—he opened the box that, on his last visit to Hermitsville, Mrs. Millington had insisted that he should take, and looked long at the pictured faces in the old daguerrotype. Who were they?—he sadly wondered—what connection had they with his life?

He could find no answer to those weighty questions, but suddenly, as he gazed, a new thought—and one he scarcely dared to clothe in language—arose in his mind.

Was he dreaming, or was there really a resemblance between those pictures and the friends he had parted from that morning?

The bare suggestion of such a resemblance made his heart throb violently. He would not suffer himself to dwell upon it, but when, a little later, he joined the boys for a walk, he could not resist asking :

“ Will, how did your aunt lose the little child she mourns so deeply ? ”

“ Why it died and went to heaven, of course,” Will answered, with great assurance.

“ You are sure ? ”

“Of course,” Will replied, in his most decided manner. “I never heard of folks losing babies in any other way ; did you ?”

John did not feel called upon to tell what he had heard, but as he listened to Will the fancy, that might have grown into a hope, was crushed ; and that night he securely sealed the box containing his mysterious treasures, wrote upon its cover, “God knows I bide his time,” and placed it among books and papers he rarely examined, in the bottom of his trunk.

Rapidly the remaining months of winter slipped away, the spring and summer followed with equal swiftness, and with the coming of autumn John decided that he must resign his pleasant position and go to the city.

He had worked faithfully by himself and made good progress ; one year more of diligent labor and he would be ready to begin his life-work, and that last year it was absolutely necessary for him to reside where he could have the assistance of lectures and greater advantages than he could command at Solitude. His year’s salary would help him well on his way. What farther means he might require he would, by some honest labor, obtain. He was possessed of life’s greatest wealth—health, strength, and ability and willingness to work—and he had no fears now that he could not make his way through difficulties.

And so, in accordance with his well-formed plans, before the red-leaf days of October came, with many regrets on their part, as well as on his, he left the pleasant family at Solitude and went to the city. He found a quiet room in a poor but respectable part of the city, accessible to the law school, and there he comfortably established himself. His meals he took at a restaurant near. It was a lonely life, but it suited him better than the uncongenial atmosphere of a cheap boarding-house, and with his books, and the copying and proof-reading with which he occupied his leisure and kept his purse from growing empty, he had no time to give to society or even to spend in wishing for it.

The temptation to devote himself exclusively to his work was often great, but firmly believing that health and physical strength were talents, for whose preservation and faithful use God would hold him as strictly accountable as for the cultivation of his mental powers, John studied carefully the laws of health, and resolutely obeyed them.

The house in which he lodged was a very small one, and he was the only lodger in it. It was occupied by a hard-working mechanic and his wife—who worked equally hard at her machine—two or three half-grown children, and an old gray-haired man who was—John soon learned—his landlady's father. He was old and bent, and

trembled as he leaned upon his stout cane, and whenever he met him John invariably stopped to speak kindly to him, and offer such little attentions as the young and strong are privileged often to give the aged and infirm.

This kindness touched the old man, who in his rough life had met with more rebuffs than attentions, and one Sabbath afternoon, as John sat alone in his room, there came a slow, hesitating knock at his door.

"Come in," he called kindly, and as the door opened he looked up and saw Grandfather Groves—as the children called him—standing timidly on the threshold.

To close the book—in which he was at that moment deeply interested—and spring up, take the old man by the hand, lead him to the fire that was burning brightly in the little grate, and seat him in the most comfortable chair in his room, was—for John—as simple and natural an act as it was for him to breathe.

"I am glad to see you, grandfather," he said sincerely; "how do you do to-day?"

The old man had placed his cane between his knees, on it clasped his two trembling hands, and now sat resting his chin on them.

"I'm tol'rable, mister, only tol'rable," he said dolefully.

"Tolerable; that means moderately comfortable,"

John said, in a bright, encouraging voice. "Look up, grandfather; it is a great thing in this world to be even moderately comfortable."

The old man shook his head slowly. "It might be worse, that's sartin," he said; "but then, too"—and a gleam that was something like humor stole into the dim eyes—"then, too, it might be better'n it is. And so you see, after all, mister, it's pretty hard to be satisfied."

John did not attempt to argue the question. He only nodded pleasantly, stirred his fire, threw on a few fresh coals and then placed a little chocolate-pot upon them. "Been out to-day, grandfather?" he asked; "been to church?"

"No," was the sober answer. "James and Jenny, they've been, an' so has the children. But someway church don't do me no good, mister, an' I b'lieve I'm better off at home."

"Why is that?" John asked, stirring the chocolate, which filled the room with its tempting odor.

"I don't seem to get no help there," the old man sighed. "I sit down there, an' try to listen, but I get to thinkin', an' don't get comforted; an' it's comfort old folks want, mister, more'n 'most anything else."

"Yes, I believe it," John said, as he brought a couple of cups, filled them with the fragrant chocolate and, placing one on a little table beside Grandfather Groves, sat down beside him.

“Drink that, grandfather,” John said kindly, and as the old man obeyed, and with evident enjoyment slowly sipped the chocolate, he waited until the nourishing drink had done its work, and freshened the tired body a little, and then he brought his little Bible, and said simply, as if speaking to a child :

“We want a great many kinds of comfort in this world, grandfather, but after all there is only one kind that never fails ; and when I feel the want of that kind most, I always find it here,” and John lovingly tapped the Bible as he spoke.

“Hey ! what ? where d’ ye find it ?” Grandfather Groves asked eagerly. But as he noticed the book his voice changed again to its usual doleful tone.

“Yes—I see—that’s the Bible,” he said slowly. “Well, mister, I s’pose it does comfort some folks. I’ve noticed that the ministers always say so ; but it don’t never seem to say much that’s comforting to me. Maybe I don’t know ’xactly where to find the good places,” he added, in a moment. “You see, mister, I’ve had a hard life, aint been much sunshine for me, only lots of hard work, lots of trouble. I aint never had much time to play, nor never many easy hours.”

“I know, grandfather. I understand it all.”

“Ay, you think so,” the trembling voice said slowly ; “but you don’t. You aint had speri-

ence. You are young; you aint been through it all yet. Wait till you are old, like me, an' then, maybe, you will understand. But I hope you wont," he exclaimed, with sudden energy; "I hope you wont never have to pass through the fires that I've gone through, an' come out scorched an' burned like me."

"Tell me about your life, grandfather," John said, feeling that to give him sympathy and win his confidence would be the surest way to do him good, and pushing away his now emptied cup the old man said:

"'Taint much to tell, mister. It's all contained in two words—work an' disappointment. I was young, like you, when I first came over here from the old country, an' I had a good trade, and what was better, a good, smart wife, if ever a man did have one. Well, I got work pretty soon, right here in this city, an' for awhile we got along with tol'able comfort. But the children came fast, mister, an' though they brought their welcome with 'em, they brought, too, harder work for me an' the mother, to keep the wolf from the door. But she didn't complain, the mother. She always said, someway or other we'd get along. But it was harder an' harder to get along, an' by an' by she seemed to get tired of trying; she give up. An' one day—one November day, just like this"—and the old man glanced through the

window, out on the gray sky that was slowly shutting out the sunshine—"she went to sleep, an' we never could wake her up again. You see, she was so tired, mister, an' it must take a long time to rest tired bodies like hers."

John's only answer was a nod and look of interest, and the sad story went on.

"I had seven children, mister, bright, pretty children they were, too, an' I tried to take care of 'em; but pretty soon scarlet fever came among 'em, an' five of 'em went after the mother. I needed comfort then; I needed it dreadfully, an' I didn't know much about Bible comfort, an' so, mister, I went down, down, fast as a man could go. I took to drink, an' I lost my work, and I despised myself; but I couldn't seem to help myself. O mister, it is dreadful to see how lives run to waste in this world."

John did not speak, and after a moment, with a long sigh, Grandfather Groves continued:

"I had two daughters left: Jenny—the one I live with now—an' Susie, as bright an' likely a girl as you could wish to see. Jenny was staid and sober, she learned to sew early, an' she married, an' she's had a tol'able good life. But Susie, she was my fav'rite, an' I set great store on her. She was pretty, an' more ambitious-like than Jenny: she said she didn't want to sew, an' so she got a place in a rich man's family. They

were good people. The gentleman gave me a place in his garden, and he helped me more'n anybody else in this world ever did. He helped me to stop drinkin'; for I did stop, mister, an' I don't never drink now;" and the old man stopped and looked longingly at John for approval.

"I am very glad," John said gently, and, as if that assurance strengthened him, the old man went on.

"There was a coachman there that Susie married pretty soon, and now things looked brighter than they'd ever done before; but sunshine don't never last long, an' so, pretty soon, there came a terrible trouble to that family, an' they blamed me, but I was innocent as a lamb." The old man paused a moment, he had suddenly grown nervous and excited, and the rest of his story was mixed and incoherent.

"I didn't know nothin' about it, mister, and I didn't mean no harm in coverin' up about poor Susie, for she'd lost her little baby, and I always think, mister, it was the trouble made her crazy. Leastways she did go crazy, and her husband went off, and Susie's been for years and years in the 'sylum, an' someway the trouble seemed to unsettle me like; I had a shock of the palsy, the doctor said, an' I aint never been the same man since."

"What was the name of that gentleman?" John asked, with an interest he could not explain.

The old man shook his head. "I've tried an' tried to think of it," he said sadly, "but I forgot most things when I had the stroke, an' I clear forget that. I never seem to remember much now, only trouble and disappointment."

"What was the trouble in the family?" John asked now.

The old man looked at him as if the question bewildered him.

"Why, didn't I tell you?" he asked mournfully. "It was about the baby. You know Susie lost her baby."

John's interest was strongly aroused; he felt very unwilling to let the subject drop, but old Mr. Groves seemed very tired, and feeling that it was cruel to worry him with questions that could only awaken unhappy memories, John opened his Bible and began to read.

The sound of the peaceful words seemed to have a soothing effect on the old man; the restless and unnatural excitement subsided, and he was soon in his usual state of tolerable comfort.

"Stop," he said presently, as John finished the beautiful story of the alabaster box of ointment, "that's what I often feel like saying, mister—'To what purpose is this waste?'"

"It was not wasted," John said gently; "it was given to the Saviour. Is anything too precious to be given to him?"

No, maybe not, if it is all true, as you think, and he wants it," the old man said, "but still, mister, there is awful waste in this world, now, isn't there? Don't you see lives bruised and hearts broken every day, and aint it waste?"

"God knows," John answered reverently.

"You say so," and Grandfather Groves raised his gray head from his cane and looked sharply at John; "then, if he knows, why doesn't he interfere? Look here, mister: there was a little child once, that ought to have grown up in a beautiful home, and made a rich, good man, but he was lost, lost." The quivering voice became strangely agitated, and the withered hands trembled so, they could hardly support the cane.

"Don't think about it," John said soothingly.

"I cannot help thinking about it," the trembling voice moaned. "Nights, when I cannot sleep, I keep thinking about it, an' trying to understand it, but it's all mysterious, and I can't explain it: but I'm always thinkin' that if there is a God in heaven, it's very strange he didn't interfere. Why did he let such waste come, mister? Do you know? can you tell?"

From Grandfather Groves' excitement John inferred that his thoughts were still dwelling on Susie's baby. "I would not call it waste," he said gently; "if you knew all, you would be glad that God took that little child into his own safe care."

Only two or three words of John's sentence did his hearer appear to notice.

"Yes," he said, while he dropped his head again upon his cane, "if I only knew—that is what I always say—if I only knew."

"You will know, some day," John said soothingly. "Listen: this is our Saviour's own promise: 'What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.'"

"Does he promise that? Ah!"—with a weary sigh—"I wish that someday would come."

"It will come, surely," was the confident answer, "but before it comes I think our Saviour wants you to do something for him."

"What?" was the quick question.

"I think he wants you to learn to trust and love him," John said softly. "I think he wants you to believe that he will do all things well, though he does not let you always understand his dealings with you."

"I haven't been a good man," the sad confession came, in broken words. "I've—been—what—you—call—a—sinner."

"You have been what Jesus died to save," was the tender answer; "you are what he is waiting to forgive."

"Waiting!—is he?—are you sure?"

"Here is his own promise: 'For this will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you.'"

He has waited many years for you ; will you"—and John's voice was very gentle—"will you keep him waiting any longer?"

"I don't know what to do, mister; tell me."

"Let us ask Jesus to tell us what to do, and make us willing to do it," John said, and kneeling, while the old man bowed his gray head upon his cane, he humbly prayed for mercy, help and light.

"Lord, help this wandering soul to arise and go unto the Father," he entreated, and when the low prayer ceased, the old man turned to him with moistened eyes.

"I'll try," he meekly promised, "I'll try to do just what you said—arise and go to the Father."

A long silence followed; the shadows of twilight deepened, until the dusk in the quiet room was only brightened by the glowing coals in the grate.

Presently Grandfather Groves spoke. "Be you going to church to-night?" he asked.

John started from the revery into which he had fallen. "I think so," he said. "Why do you ask?"

"Because," was the hesitating answer, "I believe, if you'll take me, I'll go with you. You don't think me too old to go in the evening, do you?"

"No, the church is very near."

“And you wont be ashamed of the poor old man, an’ his plain clothes?”

“Ashamed!” John answered quickly. “Grandfather, if you will go, I shall feel that God has highly honored me in letting me lead you there.”

The old man heard him with a brightening face. “That’s good,” he said with energy. “You are very good to an old man,” he continued gratefully. “’Taint every young man would do as you have done this afternoon, I know; I’ve had sperience. They say the young don’t never lose by being kind to the old, an’ I wish I might pay you in some way, some day. Do you s’pose I ever will?”

John lit the gas, and then gave him a genial smile. “I shall be paid in knowing that I can give you pleasure,” he said kindly.

The gray head nodded as it bent above the cane. “I’d like to pay in some other way,” its owner said slowly. “Well, we shall see; we always do what we are appointed to do, I s’pose.”

John turned suddenly. The slow, dreamy words recalled those other words, read long ago that Christmas eve, and then the old man said:

“Mister, it’s very strange, but someway, as you stand there now, you make me think of that gentleman—it is so strange I can’t recall his name—the one who was so good to me; where Susie lived, you know.”

“Do I?” John answered. “I am glad if I remind you of a friend,” but he added quickly, with a little dread of his visitor becoming excited again: “You haven’t told me if you will really go with me this evening.”

“Yes, I will go,” was the decided answer, “an’ after this I will go every Sunday, as long as you will take me.”

Grandfather Groves kept his promise; and the sight of the strong, fine-looking young man, gently supporting the trembling steps of the old man, became one that the regular attendants of the “Church of the Strangers” learned to watch for with peculiar pleasure, and one that the angels, who rejoice over each sinner that repenteth, witnessed with thanksgiving.

CHAPTER XV.

CONVERSATIONS.

“We yet shall see how, while we frown and sigh,
God’s plans go on as best for you and me;
And how he heeded not our feeble cry,
Because his wisdom to the end could see.
And e’en as prudent parents disallow
Too much of sweet to craving babyhood,
So God, perhaps, is keeping from us now
Life’s sweetest things. because it seemeth good.”

—*Mrs. Riley.*

A FEW days after his conversation with Grandfather Groves, John found himself at leisure to fulfil his long-postponed, but unforgotten promise, and call on Mrs. Scott.

It was a lovely Indian-summer day; there was no chill in the air, and no frost seemed to have touched the salvias and chrysanthemums that were still blooming in the beautiful gardens he passed on his way up town to the attractive suburb of the city where the Scotts resided. A carriage stood before their house, and as he placed his hand on the bell the door opened, and Mrs. Scott in her bonnet and wraps appeared before him.

“Mr. Millington,” she exclaimed, in a pleased voice, “you are more than welcome. And now,” she asked in a moment, “will you accompany me on a short drive, and then return and dine with us to-night? I was only going,” she explained, “to Miss Talbot’s, but, if you prefer, I will send the carriage away, and we will remain at home.”

“By no means,” John answered. “This is such a beautiful day that I am sure you would enjoy a drive, Mrs. Scott, and I am at your service. To me it will be a pleasure to do whatever you please.”

“Come then,” Mrs. Scott said, as she ran down the steps, “one can talk in a carriage as well as in a parlor, and out-door air, like this, is something like faith—one cannot have too much of it.”

“Some people would say it was like money in that particular,” John said playfully, as he assisted Mrs. Scott into the carriage, and took his seat beside her.

She smiled. “Do you really think the world as sordid as your words seem to denote?” she asked. “Well, perhaps some people would say so, and, in a certain, peculiar sense, I believe they would be right: for one who is willing to use it for good purposes cannot often have too much wealth. The gold of this world is a powerful agent in doing the Lord’s work, Mr. Millington; our charitable societies, and the missionary

boards, that are so often crippled for want of it, will assure us of that."

"I know it," John said thoughtfully, "and yet, since that is true, this question often presses for an answer, Mrs. Scott: Why does not the Lord, who owns the silver, and the gold, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, pour his wealth into the hands that would rejoice to do his work with it? Why are the selfish, grasping hands often filled to overflowing, while the generous hands, that would delight in giving, are often left poor, even to emptiness, and seldom bountifully supplied with the riches that they would make blessings for others, as well as for themselves?"

"Ah!" Mrs. Scott answered, with a little sigh, "that is one of life's mysteries, Mr. Millington. Perhaps—for one reason—it is to teach us that silver and gold are not, after all, as important in our Lord's sight as in ours. He is not dependent upon them, and though where he bestows them he requires them to be used freely in his service, he proves his independence of them, often, by blessing the efforts of empty hands, and giving the highest success to their labors."

"That is a pleasant thought for those whose hands are empty," John said, "but still, Mrs. Scott, the wasted wealth of this world does often seem appalling. It is not money alone, but intellect, health, affection, and even life itself

seem often recklessly squandered. I have thought much about it during the last day or two," he explained, "for Sunday an old man confronted me with this sharp question: 'To what purpose is this waste?' And though my faith whispered that it must be for wise purposes, I confess my reason was silent. It was a mystery I could not explain."

"Reason and sight are well, but faith is better," Mrs. Scott said gently. "That alabaster box was not wasted, Mr. Millington. It filled the house with its fragrance."

"I grant it," John replied gravely, "and yet—shall I confess it?—there are times when this world seems very full of broken alabaster boxes, exceeding precious, of which I can only ask this question: 'To what purpose is this waste?'"

"Not when they are broken at the feet of Christ," Mrs. Scott said softly.

"No—I suppose not—" he answered, "and still—though we acknowledge that—it is hard to understand. Think of the wasted affection in this world, Mrs. Scott. Think of the pure, true hearts, that are lavishing their priceless love on those unworthy of it, and then think of the other hearts that are pouring it forth on those, who, though worthy of it, still give it no return. Is there not sorrowful and even fearful waste there?"

Mrs. Scott studied the grave face that was partly turned from her for a few moments, and when she spoke there was a tender cadence in her voice, as if it was touched with a sympathy she dared not express in words.

“I would not called it wasted,” she said; “it is suffering, and only God, who knows how painful it is, can comfort it; but the love of a pure, true heart is never wasted, though often unreturned: you see its results often in the helpful, healing influence that such a heart exerts wherever it goes.”

The serious and almost sad face with which John had asked his question brightened a little, but his voice was still tinged with pain and, it might be, a shade of doubt, when he spoke again.

“Here is another question, Mrs. Scott: why are noble lives, standing just upon the threshold and well prepared and equipped for conflict and labor in the world, often stricken down suddenly? the fire, that promised to burn so brightly, and give out such cheering warmth, going out without warning, and leaving only the ashes of disappointment behind?”

Mrs. Scott did not answer, and after a brief silence John resumed.

“Only yesterday I read of the death of a missionary in India. He was young—but thirty-

two—finely educated, and wonderfully adapted for his chosen work. After arduous study he had just acquired the language, so as to preach and write in it with ease; he had formed plans for service that promised great results, and all his efforts to promote his Master's honor seemed to be meeting with rich success. It was a beautiful beginning, but the shadow fell, and all was ended. To-day he sleeps beneath the trees of India, and, thinking of him, can you help wondering at the Lord's dealing? Is it not natural to cry: 'To what purpose is this waste?'"

"Yes, it is natural, very natural," Mrs. Scott said, in a low tone, "but, Mr. Millington, if that young man could speak to you to-day from the Father's house, where he is now rejoicing, he would not echo your question; he would not feel that his was a wasted life. He has but finished his labor at midday—instead of waiting till the sunset—and gone up higher. To what nobler, freer, more triumphant work, we can only imagine now, but we shall understand fully, when, like him, we, too, go home."

"But the work he has left," John urged; "think how that will suffer from his loss."

"Will it? Are you sure?" Mrs. Scott asked, with a beautiful smile, though her eyes were misty. "Can you not trust the Lord to care for his own, Mr. Millington? Christianity did not

die when Paul finished his course ; it will never die so long as Christ lives.

“ I feel as if we were losing precious time, Mr. Millington. You have told me nothing yet about yourself, and there is much I want to know. I am sure you are well—” and her eyes smiled as she looked at him—“ but I am sure of nothing else ; of nothing, at least, that touches the surface of your life. Tell me—if you please—what are you doing now ? ”

“ Studying,” he answered pleasantly. “ In a year, if you require my services, Mrs. Scott, I will plead for you in the court-room.

“ Thank you,” she said, “ I appreciate your kindness ; but I shall try not to require your skill. Shall I tell you, that I am a little sorry about your choice of a profession ? ” she asked frankly. “ I do not think I could ever have chosen it for you, though I acknowledge that it is grand to maintain the integrity and majesty of God’s laws, and good men can do good work in any field. But,” she added, returning to the matter-of-fact conditions of every-day life, in which she was evidently interested, “ you have not told me how and where you are living now.”

“ That information is easily given,” John answered ; and as he spoke he handed her his card.

She looked at it with serious eyes. “ Are you comfortable there ? ” she asked. “ Pardon me, but it is a very poor part of the city.”

"I am perfectly comfortable," he said, with a smile. "The neighborhood is respectable, Mrs. Scott. That it is also poor is an advantage rather than the reverse for me. Where all are on an equality there is less temptation to covetousness."

She shook her head, and with eyes that expressed dissatisfaction looked down and studied again the bit of pasteboard in her hand.

"Mr. Millington," she said, "you must pardon me if I presume too far, but you can hardly understand how great my interest is in your welfare. Your mother"—and she gave him the old sad smile, that seemed to John sadder than tears—"may care as much. I doubt, sometimes, if she can care more. And now, that you know this, will you let me ask what I shall appreciate as a great kindness of you?"

"Gladly," he said earnestly; "you cannot ask too great a kindness, Mrs. Scott."

"Ah! you say so, because you are ignorant of the nature of my request," she answered, with some hesitation. "I fear your pride, Mr. Millington, and still I am going to brave it. You are studying hard, and when one is studying I do not think one ought to be burdened with anxious cares about dollars and cents."

She watched his face closely while she spoke. He flushed a little at her last words, but did not attempt to interrupt her, and she continued slowly :

“Will you let me—so far as I can—play the part of a good fairy in your life, Mr. Millington? Will you let me—as far as is in my power—relieve you of all anxiety about your every-day necessities? Remember,” and her tone was sad and entreating, “remember, I am rich, and I have no son.”

Tears he had no cause to be ashamed of filled John Millington’s eyes. Involuntarily he stooped and kissed the trembling hand that still held his card.

“Dear Mrs. Scott,” he said gratefully, “I cannot thank you, but I do assure you that I am not too proud to accept kindnesses from you, and—believe me—I would accept this one, if it was necessary, but indeed it is not.”

She looked at him wistfully. “I wish you would let me be the judge of the necessity,” she urged.

He smiled, threw back his shoulders, and drew himself up proudly.

“Look at me,” he said brightly. “Dear Mrs. Scott, what should I do with all my superfluous strength, if you removed from me all necessity for exerting it?”

She could not help returning his smile, but her next words showed that she was still dissatisfied.

“In what gold mines—beside your books—are you dealing now?” she asked.

“I find proof-reading and copying as remunerative as I desire,” he answered. “Dear Mrs. Scott,” he added, “believe me; between my salary last year, and what I am able now to do in hours that would not otherwise be half filled, I have enough for all my reasonable wants. As for my unreasonable wishes, I am sure you will agree with me that it is best they should remain unsatisfied.”

Mrs. Scott remained very thoughtful for a few moments. “A woman seldom argues successfully with a lawyer,” she said, playfully, then. “But, Mr. Millington,” she gently insisted, “will you give me one promise? If you find that you are taxing your strength too far, or if any emergency occurs in which friends can aid you, will you come at once to Mr. Scott and myself?”

He gave the promise; and, though his thanks were briefly spoken, she knew they came from a full heart, and with them she was forced to be content.

“Have you heard from Miss Selwyn lately?” she asked, as the carriage approached Miss Talbot’s door.

“Not since last Christmas,” he answered quietly.

“Then, of course, you are not aware that she is now visiting Miss Talbot?”

He started a little, but his voice was unchanged.

“Is she?” he asked. “I shall be glad to see her.”

Mrs. Scott made no reply, but when a few minutes later they entered Miss Talbot’s parlor, and that young lady and Ruth came forward to meet them, she watched John’s face with anxious eyes, but it told her nothing.

Ruth’s greeting was simple, sincere and unaffected, like herself. Miss Talbot was animated, talkative and inquisitive, according to her wont, and John was pleasant and quiet, with the unfailing courtesy of—as Macdonald so beautifully calls them—“the manners of the high country.”

There was no foundation, Mrs. Scott decided soon, for the unwelcome thought that had flitted into her mind, and she gladly dismissed it. The young girls were to go home with her for the night, and, feeling that he could give himself the pleasure without neglecting his books or other duties, John gratefully accepted her pressing invitation to return and dine with them.

It was early evening when they reached the house. Mr. Scott was already at home, and his welcome of John was warm and friendly, and touched with the same deep interest as had marked his wife’s a few hours before.

“I was beginning to fear you had forgotten us, Mr. Millington,” he said, as he shook his hand, “or else were so engrossed with your studies that

you could find no time for us. Books are formidable rivals sometimes, don't you think so, Ruthie?" and he turned with a smile to the young girl, who was standing near them.

Ruth looked a little embarrassed, and John said quickly: "Books can never fill the place of living friends, Mr. Scott."

"Do you think so? Well, I trust you always will," that gentleman answered. "Hearts are poor things, I think, when they can prefer musty folios to warm and living humanity. But come with me to the library, Mr. Millington; we do not dine for an hour yet, and we will leave Mrs. Scott and the young ladies to amuse themselves awhile, for I want a little quiet talk with you."

Very willingly John followed the true and noble man—whose friendship was indeed something to be proud of—and sat down by his side in the beautiful room, where pictures, marbles, bronzes and rare books in costly bindings told of wealth, and culture, and refinement.

That Mr. Scott, like his wife, was his sincere friend, John could not doubt; but he was greatly surprised when, after a few indifferent remarks, that gentleman touched upon the same subject Mrs. Scott had already discussed with him.

"I have no son, Mr. Millington," Mr. Scott said, in a grave and earnest tone, "and for the sake of one who might have been to me all that I

can well believe you are to your father, as well as for your own sake, I would be glad to assist you now."

"It does assist me," John said warmly, "to feel that I have such friends as yourself and Mrs. Scott. Pecuniary aid I do not need; but it makes the world seem very warm to know that so many in it are watching my course with interest."

Mr. Scott reached forward suddenly, and extended his hand. "With how deep and true an interest we are watching it, I cannot tell you," he said solemnly. "Go your way, Mr. Millington. I will not urge you to comply with my wishes. I admire the manly independence that is strong to rely upon itself, because, at heart, it leans with childlike dependence upon God. But remember, if at any time I can serve you, you may command me—to even more than half of my kingdom," he added, with a smile.

Just then the ring of the door-bell announced a new-comer, and a few minutes later Mr. Thorn, accompanied by the ladies, entered the library.

"Ah, Millington, well met," he said genially. "Coming events must have been casting their shadows before, for I have been thinking of you all day."

"That's a compliment I hazard nothing in asserting that Mr. Millington cannot return," Miss Talbot said playfully.

"Don't be too sure," Mr. Thorn returned. "There are some friends, Miss Talbot, who are never out of our thoughts."

"It is an open secret who those 'some friends' are," Miss Talbot said daringly, as Mr. Thorn turned from her to speak to Ruth.

John heard her words, and his eyes followed hers. He saw Ruth's blushes and half-embarrassed manner, and noticed the air of gentle deference with which Mr. Thorn addressed her, and then he resolutely turned away. He would not dwell upon the bitter thoughts that had been suggested to him, he sternly resolved; but just then Mrs. Scott came to his side, and Miss Talbot said, in a tone full of meaning:

"What do you think of our two friends over there, Mrs. Scott?"

"Very well of both of them," Mrs. Scott answered pleasantly.

"Is your piano in good tune?" Miss Talbot—like Tennyson's brook—ran on—"if it is, I think I will practise the Wedding March this evening, for already I hear wedding bells in the distance."

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Scott asked, in a serious voice. "You do not mean that there is"—

"Any engagement between them?" Miss Talbot interrupted, with a careless laugh. "Well, I am not exactly the confidential friend of either of

them, but I flatter myself that—though I am not the wizard of Culloden—I can see the shadow of coming events—as Mr. Thorn would say—pretty clearly.”

Mrs. Scott's face grew very grave; her eyes rested a moment longer on Ruth and Mr. Thorn, and then they slowly turned and fell on John.

He had heard Miss Talbot's words; but if the smile with which he met Mrs. Scott's gaze was a trifle less bright than usual it was free from all bitterness, and throughout the evening, if his spirits were not high, they were sweet and genial, and if there was a pang in his heart, it was known only to his God.

Throughout the evening Ruth seemed to avoid him, but a short time before he left she crossed the room and came to his side. “Mr. Millington,” she said gently, “it is a long time since you were in Hancock; do you mean never to visit the place again?”

“Never is a long day,” he answered, as he offered her a chair with the pleasant request, “Sit down, if you please, Miss Selwyn. I certainly hope sometime,” he explained, “to revisit Hancock, but I cannot, at present, give that sometime a certain date.”

“But that is just what I want you to do,” Ruth said, with gentle insistence. “Papa would be delighted to see you, and as for Aunt Phillis, like

Whittier's singers, she would think the day o' jubilee fairly here if she should once more see you in her kitchen."

The grave eyes with which John was watching her flashed with something of their old light. "Some day," he said pleasantly, "perhaps the jubilee and I will come together, Miss Selwyn."

"Will you let me appoint the time, then?" she asked. "In ten days Thanksgiving will be here. Will you come then?"

What made John, as he watched her, feel that Thanksgiving was one of the last days on which he wished to visit her? "I cannot," he said, in a decided and almost stern voice.

She looked pained. "I am very sorry," she said simply.

Her tone recalled him to the facts of that passing moment; and it did more; it awakened the sweet, unselfish spirit that would rather suffer than cause pain. If it would truly please her to have him visit Hancock, then he would do so. It mattered little that for him, in the visit, there would be more pain than pleasure.

"I intended spending Thanksgiving at Hermitsville," he hastened to explain, "but I shall have some time at my disposal then, and I will leave its ordering with you. Will you have me on Thanksgiving or the Sunday after?" And he smiled cheerfully as he waited for her decision.

Ruth thought a moment. "If I say Sunday, will you come up on Friday night, and give us at least two days?" she asked.

"If you wish," he answered quietly.

"Then so be it," she decided, and with unaffected pleasure she added, "Mr. Millington, you do not know how glad my tidings will make papa and Aunt Phillis."

The smile that answered her was touched with many memories, but pleasure at her pleasure brightened it, and Ruth saw that, and nothing more.

One more conversation John was destined to have that night.

"We go down town together, I believe, Millington," Mr. Thorn said, as they bade their friends good-night and left the house, "and I am glad, for I want to talk with you. Do you know what I have been thinking about lately?"

"Do I know the latest decree of fashion?" John answered lightly. "Mr. Thorn, I am sorry to say I do not."

"Nonsense," Mr. Thorn said hastily. "Do you really think my thoughts as trivial as your words intimate, Millington? Then you will, perhaps, be surprised to hear that I have had a great many serious meditations since the Christmas holidays at Solitude, and I have wakened up to the fact that if I am ever to fill a man's place in the

world, and do a man's work, and have"—with a little pause after the last word—"a man's reward, I ought to be about it."

"I quite agree with you," John said quietly.

"You are more truthful than complimentary," Mr. Thorn said, with a nervous laugh; "but, if you agree with me, I hope you will also approve of my decision. I am rich, Millington—don't think me boasting, I am simply stating a fact—and I tell you because I want you to understand that, though work is not a necessity for me, I begin to consider it a duty, and so—I am going to work."

"I am glad," John said sincerely. "What are you going to do?"

"Study medicine, I think; with the foundation already laid I can study that, and graduate in two years. I am anxious now to get through, because—your must know, Millington—there is something I want very much, that I do not want to wait for."

A silence followed. They were walking; and on under the clear, star-lighted heavens they tramped for awhile without a word; but presently John spoke, and if his voice was grave, it was free, as his thought, from all bitterness.

"Mr. Thorn," he said, "I am glad you are going to work. I believe you have chosen your profession wisely. I trust you will succeed in it,

and be an honor to it, as well as win honor from it. There is need of but one thing more to make you worthy of the reward you seek. My friend, the noblest manhood, the highest honor, is only reached by those who rejoice in being the servants of Christ. In his name, for his sake, if"—with a tremulous accent on the last words—"if not for hers, I pray you now be reconciled to Christ."

Mr. Thorn hesitated. "Millington," he said, in a voice that showed how deeply John's earnestness had touched him, "Millington, I believe in you, I appreciate your sincerity, and I must tell you I am not as sure as you think of—anything. I have great hopes; I trust they will be realized; and, some day, if I live, perhaps, I may become a Christian. When I see you, I am tempted to believe in Christianity."

John gave his hand a convulsive grasp. "We part here," he said. "Good-night. God bless you."

For one moment, without speaking, the two men stood with clasped hands. Then they parted. Mr. Thorn soon reached his home, and soon, in pleasant dreams, forgot all serious impressions; but, for a long time after he left him, John walked and thought, and the sky was pink with sunrise when he entered his quiet room. But when he did so, he had fought his battle, and won the peace they only know who come like Christian to the cross.

CHAPTER XVI.

PUZZLES.

“Father, how can I thus be bold to pray
That thou shalt grant me that or spare me this?
How should my ignorance not go astray,
How should my foolish lips not speak amiss
And ask for woe when fain they would ask bliss?

“Just as thou wilt, is just what I would will :
Give me but this, the heart to be content,
And if my wish is thwarted to lie still,
Waiting till puzzle and till pain are spent,
And the sweet thing made plain which the Lord meant.”
—*Susan Coolidge.*

TRUE to his purpose, Thanksgiving morning found John in his old home in Hermitville. Mr. and Mrs. Millington had grown old and gray with the years, but their adopted son still kept his place in their hearts.

In the course of his long life, old Mr. Millington had done many things for which his neighbors respected him ; but the one act, on which he reflected with the most unalloyed pleasure, was the kindness he had bestowed, in his childhood, on the young man to whom he could now look up with such pardonable pride. And as, with the far-

sighted vision of an old man, he looked forward and proudly anticipated what he would become, it was with thankfulness, as well as with satisfaction, that he remembered that he had been instrumental in moulding and developing his character.

The Millington children were all mature men and women now, and all married, with happy children growing up around them; and when, on that Thanksgiving day, at the family reunion, John saw three bright-eyed boys, who were proudly introduced to him as his namesakes, he understood, more fully than ever before, how warm a place he had in the affection of his adopted brothers and sisters. And while they looked up to him with a pride and admiration that owned and gloried in his superiority, he, in his noble humility, fervently prayed that he might prove always worthy of their confidence and love.

Thanksgiving day was spent with the Millingtons. Friday was claimed by Mr. Crosby, and late on Friday afternoon John started for Hancock. Both Mr. Millington and Mr. Crosby accompanied him to the station, and while chatting pleasantly with them, in the last few minutes before parting, John's eyes fell on a grizzly, rough-looking man, who seemed watching him intently.

Something about the man arrested John's attention, and for a moment he wondered if he had ever seen him before: but then the train came rushing

up and, in the excitement of bidding his friends good-bye and securing his seat, he lost sight of the stranger and quite forgot his existence.

The train had been moving several minutes, and with his mind absorbed in thoughts that were, perhaps, a trifle sadder than Thanksgiving day warranted, John sat looking from the window, with dreamy eyes that saw little of what was passing before them, when some one took the seat behind him, and in a moment a hand was laid, with some hesitation, on his shoulder.

In great surprise John turned, and saw the man he had noticed in the station, looking at him still in that curious, intent manner.

"You be the young man that used to be the boy called John Millington, aint you?" the stranger asked.

"Yes," John said calmly, "I was, and am, John Millington."

"I thought so; I knowed your face. Faces tell strange things sometimes, don't they now?" And the man looked more keenly than ever at John.

"I hope mine tells the truth," John answered, while he tried vainly to imagine who his strange questioner was.

"It tells the truth, I b'lieve," the man said slowly; "if only we can make the folks it most concerns b'lieve it too, it will be all right."

“What do you mean?” John asked earnestly. “Who are you? Will you tell me if I ought to know you?”

“You haint as good a memory as I have,” the man said, with a grim smile. “I s’pose you’ve forgot the time when you got lost in the woods, aint you? an’ you aint no recollection of the man that brought you home, I s’pose, now, have you?”

In his excitement John sprang to his feet. The wood-cutter, whom for years he had dreamed of finding, was there before him. Had he anything to tell him? if he had, what would it be?

John held his breath as he asked himself those questions, then resumed his seat, and became outwardly quiet and calm as usual. He comprehended fully how much might depend upon the conversation of the next few minutes, and he firmly resolved that he would learn now all the man could tell him, and whatever the story he would bear it, in the strength he trusted God would give him.

“Yes, I remember you well now,” he said quietly. “I have wished often to see you, and I am glad at last to meet you again. Will you tell me your name?”

“Yes, I can tell you mine easier than you can tell me yours,” the man said, in a curious voice. “Mine’s no secret; it is Francis Sharp. Now, one good turn deserves another; they say, so s’pose you tell me yours.”

"You know it already," John answered, in the low, quiet voice, that by a great effort he forced himself to maintain.

"P'raps I do," the man said slowly, "still, I aint certain. You aint really John Millington, be you, now?"

John hesitated. "I know no other name," he said calmly, in a second.

"No, more's the pity; that's true, you don't," his strange acquaintance answered. "But maybe you will some day; we'll see, we'll see."

John waited impatiently. Francis Sharp appeared to have fallen into a deep study, and, if he had anything of importance to tell, he was plainly in no haste to communicate it.

"Whatever you know, or think you know of me, I shall be grateful if you will tell me," John said at last.

"Yes, so I will," Francis Sharp answered. "But it will take time—take time—an' I must feel my way."

"How do you mean?" John asked desperately. "Do you want money?"

"No, no," Francis Sharp said, with a gleam of anger in his eyes; "I want nothin' but justice; justice, an' certainty."

John crushed, with stern resolution, the fierce impatience that was threatening to master him.

"Justice from whom?" he asked calmly.

Francis Sharp gave him another keen look. "I want no justice done to me," he said with energy. "It's justice I want to do—justice I vowed to do more'n twenty years ago; justice I've been trying to do every day of my life ever since."

Was the man insane? John began to think so.

"Will you tell me, plainly, what you mean?" he asked, in a kind voice.

"I will, soon as I can; soon as I see all things clear, and know there aint no mistake," the man answered.

"An' now," he said, after a moment's silence, "if I ask you some questions, will you promise fair to answer them?"

John grew pale, but he promised firmly, "Yes."

"I only ask 'em for your own good," Francis Sharp said, as he watched him. "Now, first, you aint no Millington really, be you?"

"No." The bitter truth was acknowledged in a low but firm voice.

"You was brought to Hermitsville when you was a baby, wasn't you? an' a strange woman left you at Mr. Millington's, didn't she?"

Was she my mother? John longed to ask, but his lips refused to utter the words, and he could only say huskily, "Yes."

"I knowed it, I knowed it," Francis Sharp said, in great excitement. "I knowed it when I was here afore. Oh"—and the strange man,

fairly groaned—"oh, it's dreadful to think of the years that have been lost without justice bein' done!"

"Perhaps they have not been lost," John said, in a voice that grew calmer, as the certainty that some important revelation awaited him became plainer.

"You don't know," Francis Sharp said, with a sigh, "you don't know nothin' 't all about it. You see," he went on confidentially, "I've been lookin' for you ever since she took you off. The detectives giv' up, but I didn't giv' up, an' at last, once when she seemed kind of sensible like, I got a clue and that brought me to Hermitsville when you was a little boy. I got a place to cut wood, an' I said nothin' to nobody, but I watched all the boys, an' 'mong 'em all I picked out you. That day you came to the woods I knowed you, and when you went to sleep I studied your face, an' then I felt sure as I was livin' that I wasn't wrong. I knowed I couldn't be, for the likeness was too strong. I went right off then, but I couldn't find the folks I wanted, an' so I come back and cut wood till late that summer, and then, jest about the time you went to school, I started agin. You've got that picture, I giv' you then, safe, aint you?" and he waited anxiously for John's answer.

"Yes," John said, and though he longed to say more, he could not.

“Keep it safe,” Francis said earnestly. “When she left you, did you have anything on that could be a kind of clue like, you know?”

“I have a necklace.”

“Hey? what?” Francis said quickly. “Well, keep it safe, keep it safe. It will tell yet; yes, it will tell.”

“But when,” John asked breathlessly, “when will it tell?”

“When I’ve found them,” Francis said, with solemn confidence. “You see,” he continued to explain, “when I left Hermitsville that first time, I went straight to the old home. I meant to bring ’em right back with me, but they were gone; they’d sold the place, an’ they were travelling—been travelling for years, all over creation, I b’lieve. Well, then, you see, I went back to Hermitsville, and I used to think nights what I should do, and when I went away that last time I started to foller them. I’ve follered em’ here, an’ I’ve follered ’em there, and once I crossed the ocean after ’em, but I was always too late, always”—with a heavy sigh—“jest too late.”

“Why didn’t you write?”

“I aint no letter writer, an’ I didn’t know where to send a letter, no better than I knew where to go myself, an’ besides, I wanted to tell my story in my own words,” Francis said, revealing in that explanation the obstinacy that had

kept him faithful to his search, and, perhaps, at the same time, caused it to fail, by making him unwilling to accomplish his purpose in any way but the one he had at first decided upon.

“Who are the people you are looking for?” John asked now.

“You’ll know; you’ll know when I’ve found them,” Francis said earnestly. “I don’t want to raise no false hopes, but I’ve got a clue now. I jest wanted to make sure where you was, an’ so I came to Hermitsville to-day. I’ve found you, an’ now I’m going after them. Don’t you run away nowhere; an’ you let me know where to find you when I want you. You don’t live in Hermitsville no longer, do you?”

“No; in the city. Take this card; it will tell you where to find me.”

Francis thrust the card into his pocket.

“Be you going to stay long where you are going now?” he asked.

“No, only till Monday.”

Francis nodded approvingly. “I can’t say jest when I’ll want you,” he exclaimed, “but when I do, you must be ready. If I can find them, an’ make them b’lieve me, it will all be right, and then”—with a long drawn breath—“I will have done justice, an’ I’ll be satisfied.”

“Wont you tell me whom you want to find?” John entreated once more.

Francis Sharp shook his head. "It aint best," he said. "Nothing's sure. Maybe they wont b'lieve me, an' I can't raise no false hopes; you keep right on at your duty, an' when it's all clear I'll come for you."

"Tell me one thing, I beg you," John pleaded, in a low and anxious voice. "That woman—was she—was she—my mother?"

"You don't like to b'lieve she was, do you?" Francis Sharp said shrewdly, "but"—and his voice grew very gentle and even sad—"she'd have been a good mother, if the trouble hadn't come. I'll always say that."

The train slackened just here. They were approaching a station at which another train bound for the city was waiting. Francis saw it from the window.

"I'll stop here," he said hastily. "I'll go right back to the city, an' foller my clue; but you keep on to where you was going. I don't want you yet. Good-bye," and in another moment the trains, that had met for an instant, separated, and Francis Sharp returned to the city, while, in a strangely confused and troubled state of mind, John went on to Hancock. It was dark when he arrived there. Almost enough bewildered to doubt his own identity, he stepped from the car and tried, by giving himself a vigorous shake, to recall his scattered senses. As he

did so a familiar voice spoke his name, and, looking up, he saw Professor Selwyn and Ruth standing near and plainly waiting for him.

Their smiling faces, and the grasp of their warm hands, restored him to himself. With stern resolution he put Francis Sharp and his bewildering communication out of his thoughts, and gave himself up to the tranquil pleasures of the present moment.

Little was changed in Professor Selwyn's home. Aunt Anna looked at him critically an instant, greeted him in her quiet, matter-of-course manner, and then resumed the knitting, that seemed as much a part of herself as her hands. But if the welcome he received in the parlor was an indifferent one, Aunt Phillis' enthusiastic reception made ample amends.

"Well, Massa John," she said joyously, "you just have done improved the years, an' no mistake. You went away a boy, an' you've come back a man. And a good man, too, I hope?" Her black eyes looked at him inquiringly.

"I've tried to be good, Aunt Phillis."

"I's satisfied." And Aunt Phillis went on with some elaborate preparations for supper. "Them that tries is always helped. I knowed you wouldn't be let to fall."

"Fall from what, Aunt Phillis?" Ruth asked, with a hint of mischief in her voice.

“You go long, child ; you’s a Presbyterian, an’ I’m a Methodist. But it don’t make no matter, after all, what we calls ourselves, for the Lord will keep his own. Aint Miss Ruth growed, Massa John ?” And the faithful servant looked with pride on her young mistress.

“Yes ; your kitchen must miss the little girl we used to see here, Auntie.”

“I ’spect it does,” Aunt Phillis said soberly. “But then, you see, I’ve only had the fust taste of the missin,’ Massa John. I ’spect this whole house will miss her some day, for she’ll be goin’ afore long, I calk’late, to make somebody else’s home happy.”

Ruth turned quickly. “We’ll come and see you again, Aunt Phillis,” she said kindly, and without another word she led John back to her father’s study.

Through all the next day Professor Selwyn claimed John’s time. He saw little of Ruth, and he half-fancied that she did not care to be with him ; but on Sunday evening she suddenly proposed visiting Aunt Phillis, and together they went down to the kitchen. It was clean, and bright, and pleasant, just as John remembered it in other years, and Aunt Phillis, as she sat in her chintz-cushioned rocker, with her Bible, was so little changed, that for a moment he felt inclined to believe the years that had passed since he sat

there with her were all a dream, and he glanced at Ruth, half-expecting to see again the sunny-haired child who had made his boyish life so bright. But one glimpse of the smiling face Ruth just then turned towards him dispelled that illusion, and with a suppressed sigh he took the chair Aunt Phillis offered him and waited for her to speak.

“Massa John,” she said soberly, “be you goin’ to be a great man some day?”

He smiled a little. “I have received no revelations to that effect, auntie,” he said pleasantly.

“I know,” she said wisely, “the future don’t never tell its secrets aforehand; but I think you will be, an’ when you are a great man, Massa John”—and the humble voice grew low and soft—“I hope you will be a consecrated man.”

“I hope so too, he answered gently. “It is what I pray to be every day, Aunt Phillis.”

Ruth had listened with a thoughtful shadow on her young face. “Do you know,” she said, a little shyly, “it always makes me shrink to hear people talk of consecration.”

“Does it? Why, Miss Ruth?”

“I don’t know—quite—” she answered slowly; “but consecration seems to me often only another name for suffering. One has to give up and renounce so much.”

“Have you no faith in the beautiful law of

compensation?" John asked quietly. "If on the one side there is renunciation, on the other there are blessings beyond our richest dreams."

Ruth looked at him a moment, and her lips parted, as if more than one question was waiting to be asked; then her expression changed, she put her hand in her pocket and brought out a scrap of paper.

"I found this the other day," she said, "and I cannot tell you how often since I have found myself repeating it. Listen, Mr. Millington," and in a low voice she read:

" ' Child of mine, I love thee,
Listen now to me,
And make answer truly
While I question thee.

" ' Thou hast craved my power
And presence in thy soul,
Wilt thou yield thee truly
Unto my control?

" ' Wilt thou let me ever
With thee have my way?
Yield thyself in all things
Simply to obey?

" ' When I give to others,
What I thee deny,
Flood them with my sunshine,
Wholly pass thee by,

" ' Wilt thou still believe in
My strong love for thee?
Yield thee to my purpose,
Whatso'er it be? ' "

The low, sweet reading ceased, and a deep silence pervaded the quiet room. Aunt Phillis was not looking at them, but on her open Bible, and with his elbows on the table before him John sat with his head resting in his hands, in the old boyish attitude in which Ruth had seen him often sit when studying.

"Mr. Millington," she asked softly, "could you say, yes, to those questions?"

He raised his head. She did not know with what humility he had been searching his heart during her reading; she little dreamed how much of life's sunshine he felt he would be forced to renounce; but she felt the deep sincerity of his voice, as he answered simply:

"Yes, Miss Ruth."

"And you are not afraid to walk in the shadow?" she asked again. "Remember, the sunshine may wholly pass you by."

"It may," he said gravely, "but, Miss Ruth, there is such a thing as walking through the valley of humiliation, and yet having a sunshine—brighter than ever illumines this world—all the way."

Her own eyes fell then. "It is the gloom of that valley that frightens me," she confessed, "and it seems as if the angel of consecration has always to be the angel of sorrow. The best people are always the ones to suffer most. Why

does it have to be?" and she looked appealingly at John.

"I do not know that it does have to be," he answered gently. "I think God sends the angel of comfort always hand in hand with the angel of sorrow; and the work of sorrow is something like the work of the sculptor's chisel, Miss Ruth: it liberates the imprisoned beauty of the soul, and crowns it with immortality. Have you ever read of the wonderful wind-flower of South America?"

"No," she answered.

"It grows upon the plains of South America," John quietly explained; "the flower is very lovely, and of the purest white, but it has this wonderful peculiarity"—and the smile that curved John's lips was touched with the beauty of his thought—"it is only visible when the wind blows. At all other times the rough, spike-like leaves close like a sheath over the beautiful flower, and keep it closely concealed."

"Can you read my parable, Miss Ruth?" John asked, when, after several minutes, Ruth still remained silent.

She looked at him very humbly. "You think sorrow does for the soul, what the wind does for that flower," she said thoughtfully.

"Sorrow that God sanctifies and blesses," he answered. "We should never know how beautiful some hearts are, if the shadows of pain did

not sometimes darken them, and the winds of trial blow over them."

"Children," Aunt Phillis said, now, "children, while you've been talkin' parables I've been thinkin' of my Testament. And now, I'll jest tell you what I've learned; it aint so much what God gives or takes from us, but it is what God commands us, that we must think of, if we would be consecrated."

"What does he command, Auntie?" Ruth asked.

"This," Aunt Phillis slowly answered. "He says—Come unto me—and then we leave the world. He says—Take my yoke—and then we leave the doing of our own wills. He says—Learn of me—and then we sit down in his school, to study his lessons. And then, honey"—and Aunt Phillis looked lovingly at Ruth—"we aint afraid no longer, and we grow—content."

There were tears in Ruth Selwyn's eyes. She asked no more questions of Aunt Phillis, but that night, in the silence of her own room, she read again her little verse, and once more asked herself this question:

"When I give to others
What I thee deny,
Flood them with my sunshine,
Wholly pass thee by,

‘ Wilt thou still believe in
My strong love for thee?
Yield thee to my purpose,
Whatso’er it be? ’ ”

There was a struggle in the young girl’s heart,
known only to herself and to her Maker; but,
when it ceased, she, too, could answer :

“ Yes. ”

CHAPTER XVII.

DISCOVERIES.

“If we could push ajar the gates of life,
And stand within, and all God’s workings see,
We could interpret all this doubt and strife,
And for each mystery could find a key.
But not to-day. Then be content, poor heart;
God’s plans, like lilies, pure and white, unfold.
We must not tear the close-shut leaves apart;
Time will reveal the calyxes of gold.”

—*Mrs. Riley.*

EARLY on Monday morning John returned to the city. Whatever causes for secret anxiety and unrest he had, he resolutely controlled, and, throwing himself with renewed ardor into his work, he tried to leave all troublesome matters in the hands of him who alone understood them and could alone explain them.

At first he daily expected a visit from Francis Sharp; but when a fortnight had passed, and brought no tidings from, or of, that strange man, the fancy that had crossed his mind in the car returned with increased force, and he accepted the man’s insanity as a fact no longer to be questioned. Even with that admission, many things

seemed mysterious, but they were mysteries of which God held the key. When the glad day of revelation came they would all be made plain. Comfort and strength came with that thought, and if John's face grew graver, his faith, at the same time, grew stronger for the discipline that was testing it.

He was sitting one afternoon in his room, busy, as usual, with books and papers, when some one gave a quick, impatient knock on his door, and on opening it, to his great surprise, he faced Mr. Thorn.

"Well, Millington," that gentleman said, as he walked into the room and threw himself, with a despondent air, into the chair John offered him, "one might almost as easily climb to an eagle's eyrie as get up here to you. I hope you appreciate the effort I've made to reach you."

"Perhaps I shall be better able to appreciate it, when I know the reason for it," John answered, with a smile.

Mr. Thorn scanned him a moment with gloomy eyes. "What a trick you have of bringing a man directly to the point," he said. "I hope I will never be a witness you will have to examine."

"What do you want me to do now?" John asked playfully.

"Want? I am sure I hardly know. If you

could examine me, and find out what I am good for, and for what purpose—in the economy of nature—I was created, I would be glad. But I don't suppose even your wisdom is sufficient to throw light on a question as occult as that."

John's lips opened suddenly and then closed firmly. Without a word he pushed his books and papers aside, and calmly waited.

Mr. Thorn watched him with a smile, expressive of more bitterness than pleasure. "You are true to your profession; you won't give a man any more voluntary information than you are compelled to give, will you?" he said grimly. "Well, Millington, it doesn't matter much whether you answer me or remain silent; I have come to tell you my trouble—though why I do so, I cannot explain, even to myself—and"—with sudden and emphatic energy—"I will tell it. Millington, a week ago I sent a letter to Hancock. I received an answer to-day. I threw it into the fire, and wished I could throw myself after it. There—now you know all."

Through that brief recital John's face had grown very pale. Now, when Mr. Thorn ceased, he neither stirred nor spoke for several moments, and when, at last, with an evident effort, he forced himself to speak, it was only to ask:

"Can I do anything for you?"

"If you cannot, then no one can," Mr. Thorn

said desperately. "I haven't faith in many, but I do believe in you. Millington, I am terribly disappointed. I never had any encouragement. I had no right to hope—and yet, I did hope; and now—my hopes, like my letter, are nothing but dust and ashes. I have tried the world. I have never found it very satisfactory—it will be less so than ever in future; and now—if there is, as you affirm, any comfort and satisfaction in religion, I want you to help me to find it."

"How am I to do that?" John asked gravely, as he turned now and looked, with serious but kind eyes, at his visitor.

"Convince me that the Bible is what it professes to be; convince me that Christ is what you assert him to be."

"By argument?"

"I suppose so." And Mr. Thorn settled himself as if for a long conversation.

"I cannot, my friend. You have been brought up in a Christian family. You have been under the preaching of a Christian pulpit. Words will do you no good. You have resisted them all your life—you will resist them still."

"Then, what am I to do?" Mr. Thorn asked, in a tone almost of despair.

"Begin with doing God's will," John gently, but firmly advised.

"When I am not sure that I believe in him?"

Quietly John reached for his Bible and opened it. "Here is the promise," he said, in a moment: "'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.'"

Slowly John read the sacred promise, and then closed the book.

"That is Christ's own promise," he said gravely. "I cannot give you better or different directions. Mr. Thorn, you have never studied your Bible; search it now—not with the spirit of a doubter, looking for difficulties, but in the spirit of an humble learner, willing to be taught. You have never prayed. Pray now, and humbly intreat, if there is light, to be guided by the Spirit into it. Self has always had your first and best service. Begin now to practise the laws of Christ, and serve God and your neighbor; and, if you do so, you will not long ask any man to convince you of the truth of the solemn facts you now doubt. This promise will be fulfilled; you will have the witness in your own heart, and with Peter you will say to your Saviour: 'I believe, and am sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

John paused, and the silence lasted until the last sunbeam had left the little room, and the shadows warned that night was coming. Then Mr. Thorn arose.

"Millington," he said, as he took John's hand

and held it fast, "I came to you in desperation. I am going away to follow your advice. It seems reasonable that obedience should be the pathway to peace, and if light and comfort are to be found in this life, they are surely worth seeking for. Good-bye, and remember"—and the young man's voice choked now—"whatever good comes to you in the future, I shall wish you only joy."

There is little more to be told of Mr. Thorn in this story, but perhaps the angels will have more to tell, when they relate the stories of the lives they have watched on earth.

Three years later John stood on the wharf of a far-off western city, watching an ocean steamer as it glided slowly out of sight. Two figures stood upon its deck. "Good-bye," he shouted, and softly across the rippling waters the same sad word was wafted back to him.

"Going out as a medical missionary and taking his wife with him, is he?" said a gentleman, who stood beside John. "Well, medical service in our mission stations offers a great field of labor to any Christian physician. I hope your friend will meet with great success, and receive as great a reward."

"I hope so, too," John answered fervently, and we will echo his last words, as, with him, we catch our last glimpse of Mr. Thorn and Miss Talbot.

December was well on its way now : the Christmas holidays were again approaching, and one day—not long after his interview with Mr. Thorn—John found, on returning from the law-school, two letters on his table.

One was from Mrs. Rolfe. The Scotts, and Miss Winthrop, and Miss Selwyn, were to brighten Solitude again with their presence during the holidays, she wrote ; and she not only kindly invited, but urgently entreated John to make one of her party.

Where her eloquence failed, she said, in conclusion, she trusted her boys' would prove irresistible, and with a smile John took up the other letter, that was directed in Will's round, boyish hand.

"DEAR MR. MILLINGTON [John read] : Jack and I are writing this letter together. I am to do the writing, and Jack is to spell the hard words and think of what I forget, and so I guess—between us—we will make out to tell you everything we want you to know.

"The holidays are almost here, and we are so glad that we don't know how to tell it. I suppose we might find words enough in the dictionary to tell it with, but then the dictionary is such a big book, and I don't believe it will make any difference, for you were a little boy once ; and so, if you'll just play you were one again, you will know what we mean.

"We've been at boarding-school three months, and we don't like it very well. There are rules for everything, and so it's a great deal more certain than tutors, but then, too, it is a great deal harder. You see the lessons are long, and we have to study very hard to learn them ; and the rules are strict, and we have to try very hard to keep them, and even when we try hardest, it does seem very easy to break them.

"But Friday night, if nothing happens—and nothing will happen—we are going to shut our books with a BANG—Jack says, print that word in large letters, 'cause we want you to know just what a loud bang it will be—and we are going home fast as the cars can carry us. And now, Mr. Millington, we'll tell you why we are writing this letter. Jack and I want you to spend Christmas at Solitude with us.

"We want you for almost as many reasons as there are plums in mamma's Christmas pudding. We want you to skate with us, and ride horseback with us. We want you to examine us, and see if we haven't improved, and then we want you to advise us and help us to be good. For Jack and I do try to be good boys, though sometimes it does seem as if this was a pretty hard world for boys to be good in.

"Hoping for a prompt reply, in person, we remain, Mr. Millington,
Your very obedient servants,

"MESSRS. JACK AND WILL ROLFE.

"P. S. We copied that signature from a business card, so we guess that's right; but if we have made any mistakes in this letter, we hope you will excuse them, for you will know what we mean."

The boys' eloquence proved, as Mrs. Rolfe had hoped, irresistible, and the Saturday before Christmas—which this year came on Monday—John went down to Solitude. Warm hearts welcomed him there, and the first few days passed very pleasantly, but uneventfully, and the last Saturday of the old year dawned.

That day proved a very dreary and stormy one; going out, for pleasure, was not to be thought of, and in the course of the morning Miss Winthrop suddenly proposed to John to assist her in examining Mr. Rolfe's library.

“It has been accumulating for years,” she said; “the Rolfes have always been book-lovers, and, though I have never had a good opportunity to look it well through, I believe it will richly repay us if we do so to-day. So come, Mr. Millington, and let us see if we cannot find some old manuscript worth reporting to the world.”

Very willingly John acceded to her wishes. The library was the largest room in the house, but from the floor to the ceiling it was crowded with books, and papers, and precious works of art. One corner was especially devoted to files of old papers.

“Looks almost like a newspaper office, doesn’t it?” Miss Winthrop said laughingly. “After all, I believe it is a wise plan to put papers on file in this way. Questions often arise on which old papers, if we had them to refer to, might throw a good deal of light. Now,” she said, as she proceeded to examine a certain file, “here are papers that date back for a quarter of a century, and, just for the gratification of my never-satisfied curiosity, I am going to see what the *City Mirror* so many years ago found worth reporting.

John was already examining a very rare edition of Shakespeare, but he looked up with a pleasant smile.

“Few possess old Shakespeare’s art, and know how to select from the incidents of daily life those

that will be of interest through all the ages," he said, "but I hope your search will be rewarded by the discovery of something well worth remembering. What date have you?"

"Oh, it's a June paper, twenty-three years old next summer," she said, as she sat down and proceeded to open the old paper as if she intended really to read it carefully. "I was young then, and many pleasant things happened in those days. I am going to see if the scent of the roses hangs round those old memories still."

"Do you want my help in your labor of love?" John asked pleasantly.

"No," she answered, with a laugh. "I am at least equal to giving a newspaper an examination, and, I can assure you, I always do it thoroughly; even advertisements never escape my eyes.

"Whew!" she exclaimed, in a few moments, with almost a whistle of astonishment; "it is a pity that some one else didn't examine this paper thoroughly years ago."

"Did you speak to me?" John asked, without raising his eyes and so absorbed in his book that he had only heard the sound of her voice, without heeding her words.

She stared at him for a minute, as if her senses were wandering, then turned again to her paper, read over a few lines in it with great care, and then once more looked at John.

"Mr. Millington," she said presently, in a quick, excited voice, "your home is in Hermitsville, is it not?"

"Yes," he answered quietly; "it is a pleasant place; were you ever there, Miss Winthrop?"

"No," she said, with seriousness. "It's a great pity, but I never was."

"If you should ever go there, I think you would feel well repaid," he said, with his eyes still on his book.

She looked at him again, with a peculiar expression on her thoughtful face.

"Many a careless word is touched with a meaning of which the speaker little dreams," she said, as she folded her paper. "No," she added, more to herself than to John, as she left the room, "I have never been to Hermitsville; that is true to-day; but if I live, it will not be true much longer."

Quickly—in an excited state of mind, that she, by a great effort, succeeded in keeping well subdued—Miss Winthrop went up-stairs to Mrs. Rolfe's room.

"Are you here, Emma, and are you alone?" she asked cautiously, as she opened the door.

"All alone," Mrs. Rolfe answered, with a smile, "and very glad to see you, Annie."

"You ought to be," Miss Winthrop said oracularly. "Everybody in this house ought to be,

and would be, glad to see me, if they knew what I believe I know now."

"I have been glad to see you for a great many years, just because I did not know all that you know," Mrs. Rolfe answered playfully.

"We are talking nonsense, when the fate—of a life—perhaps, depends upon our being sensible," Miss Winthrop said, with impatience. "Emma," she continued, very seriously, "see here; I have a secret to tell you, but you must remember that it is only a surmise at present, and you must promise not to lisp one syllable of it until I have proved it a certainty."

Mrs. Rolfe nodded, and Miss Winthrop went on.

"I've been looking over the old papers in the library, and I've found"—she broke off suddenly and looked solemnly at Mrs. Rolfe—"what do you imagine I have found?" she asked slowly.

"Positive proof as to who wrote the Letters of Junius, possibly," Mrs. Rolfe said, with a laugh.

"I have found positive proof—at least, what I believe to be positive proof—about somebody a good deal more interesting to us than the author of Junius," Miss Winthrop said, with decision. "Read that, Emma;" and she handed Mrs. Rolfe the paper, and pointed to a short paragraph on a page filled with advertisements.

With a smiling face, that quickly changed first, to an expression of great surprise, and then to one of intense interest, Mrs. Rolfe took the paper and slowly read :

“Information wanted of the woman who left a young child at my house on the seventh of June. Any information of her, or of other friends of the child, will be thankfully received by Charles Millington, Hermitsville, New York.”

“Well,” Miss Winthrop said, as Mrs. Rolfe dropped the paper and looked at her in almost blank astonishment, “what do you think of that, Emma?”

“It—is—mys—terious,” Mrs. Rolfe, after several attempts, succeeded in feebly ejaculating.

“Mysterious?—It is as clear as sunshine to me, and it wont be mysterious to you, or any one, long, after I have succeeded in getting to Hermitsville,” Miss Winthrop declared with energy. “I think we have all been blind as bats, Emma; too blind even to read the newspapers when they were opened before our eyes.”

“What shall we do?” Mrs. Rolfe asked anxiously.

“Do nothing until I come back or send you word from Hermitsville,” Miss Winthrop counselled. “We wont raise any hopes that would only kill if they proved false; but I will start for Hermitsville this very night, and I do believe”

—and Miss Winthrop seized the paper, and scanned the advertisement again, as she spoke—“I do firmly believe, Emma, that I am on the right trail at last.”

“It will not do to be too sanguine,” Mrs. Rolfe said soberly. “If that Millington is the man we suppose, he is a farmer with a large family of children. Do you suppose such a man would keep, or indeed could afford to keep, a little waif, and bring it up as his own child?”

“I suppose he knew that he could well afford to do God’s will,” Miss Winthrop answered. “You need not try to dishearten me, Emma, for I have not a doubt; everything points that way. That wonderful resemblance, that impressed me the moment I saw him; his age—he told me yesterday that he was born just twenty-three years ago, on Christmas; that motto, *Tenax propositi*—how did he come by that, I want to know, if he is not what we think him? And then that strange, mysterious attraction that they seemed at once to feel towards each other—do you think there was no meaning in that? We never pay the attention that we ought to the drawings and repulsions of our souls, and now it makes my heart ache”—and the excited woman clasped her hands in despair—“to think what blind and deaf mortals we have been.”

“You see—if it is as we hope—it was his speak-

ing of his parents that misled us all," Mrs. Rolfe now said, thoughtfully.

"Just as if, in all our lives, we never had heard of adopted children who talked of their fathers and mothers," Miss Winthrop answered, almost angrily. "Well, there is one consolation; he will be an honor to them now, and in the joy of seeing him the man he is, they may find a little comfort for the years they have missed and mourned him. But we won't say one word about this, Emma"—she repeated again—"until I have made an investigation; and if you will give me my lunch, and send me to the station, I'll start on the afternoon train." And as she left the room, to make her arrangements for an immediate departure, Miss Winthrop once more said, emphatically, "I do believe I am on the right trail at last."

"Oh, Miss Winthrop," Ruth said, when a minute later she met her in the hall, on the way to her room, "I was just coming to see you."

"Were you?" Miss Winthrop said, as without stopping she hurried on. "I am sorry, my dear, but you must excuse me. I have some important business to attend to, and must work instead of talking. But," she added, as she turned her door-knob, "I wish you would do something for me: I left the newspapers in the library in great disorder, I wish you would go there and put them on the file again."

“Very well,” Ruth said cheerfully, as she tripped down-stairs.

She hesitated a little, however, when, on opening the door of the library, she saw John sitting there alone. “Miss Winthrop sent me,” she said, in some embarrassment, as he looked up and saw her.

“Come in, Miss Selwyn,” he answered pleasantly; “you must not think me selfish enough to wish to monopolize this beautiful room. I hope you have had a pleasant morning, though it is so dreary without,” he added, as she came up to the table by which he was sitting.

“I have been with the boys,” she said, with a business-like air, as she proceeded to arrange the papers. “What do you think I left them doing, Mr. Millington?”

He laughed. “You might almost as well ask me to tell you what they will be doing a year from to-day as what they are doing now,” he said. “It is pretty difficult to follow the workings of a boy’s mind, or body, when he is out of your sight.”

“Just at present,” Ruth answered gayly, “they are working their minds; and I left them trying, through all the changes in English history, to trace Queen Victoria’s family back to William the Conqueror.”

“I hope they were succeeding,” John said, with a smile, meant more for Ruth than the boys.

"I am not sure," she said laughingly. "They were getting pretty well bewildered in an ancestral labyrinth, and, when I left them, Will had just declared, that the House of Brunswick was a good deal harder to trace than the House that Jack Built. What a fascination there is in tracing ancestry, isn't there, Mr. Millington?"

"Seems to be, when it's a queen's," John answered lightly.

Ruth did not reply; she was busy with the papers, and the library was very quiet for a few moments. Suddenly, moved by some impulse—he did not stop to trace it to its source—John asked:

"What do you suppose those do who have no ancestors, Miss Selwyn?"

"I cannot possibly imagine such a pitiful state of affairs for any poor human being," she said, with a merry laugh.

He looked at her an instant, and then very gravely he answered, "Try to do so, for it is my state."

"Yours?" The play and light faded suddenly from her face; the lips that had been curved with a happy smile straightened and were tightly compressed. "Yours?" she repeated.

"I have no ancestors to tell of," he said, in a very firm and quiet voice. "I have no family. I do not know who my parents were. I do not even know my own name."

She looked at him with an expression of utter bewilderment. "I cannot understand," she said, in a puzzled tone. "I thought Mr. and Mrs. Millington—"

"They protected me when I was a helpless and deserted infant," he gravely explained, as she paused. "They have been kind as parents, and I have always called them father and mother. But they are only adopted parents. Of my own parents I know nothing; I am absolutely ignorant of my own history."

He had told his story quietly, and without looking at her. He wished her to know the truth. He expected it would startle and shock her, and, it might be, sadden her a little, for he knew her thought of him was kind and friendly, but he expected nothing more.

But even while he was speaking, Ruth left her seat, and now she stood close beside him.

With sober eyes he turned and looked at her. Her slight figure was drawn up to its full height; her proud head was thrown back, her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were flashing with a brilliant light.

"Mr. Millington," she said, and her clear voice was at once very sweet and very proud, "Mr. Millington, I do not pity you. I am almost glad you have no family. I am thankful you have had no props to support you, save your God and

yourself. I am proud that you have proved how independent a man can be of circumstances. I think it is grand to show the world, as you have, how noble, how full of dignity the man can be, who—though he has no external helps—rests upon God, and with a whole heart does his duty. I think it is a greater honor to be such a man than to be a king.”

John’s face had flushed and then grown very pale during Ruth’s impulsive speech, and now, prompted by a secret, untold pain, he said, “Such a life must be a very lonely one, Miss Ruth.”

“Lonely!” she repeated, still too impulsive, and too anxious to comfort him to consider her words; “I do not think you can be lonely, when you make every one love you.”

He had not meant to ask it, but now the impetuous question sprang to his lips:

“Do I—can I make—you?”

There came no answer; the color faded a little, and the proud head drooped: he saw it, but he did not understand.

“If I cannot, my life must always be lonely,” he said sadly, as he half turned from her.

She looked up then, and her sweet face was stirred with many feelings.

“I never knew—I never dared to hope—you cared for me so much,” she said simply.

“May I tell our friends?” Ruth asked a little later.

“Tell whom you please,” he answered proudly. “I feel, myself, very much like publishing to all the world that I have found a treasure. Only”—and the bright voice sobered a little—“it may be years before I can claim that treasure. I must not let you forget, dear, that I am very poor, as well as nameless.”

With the soul that made her womanhood so royal shining in her eyes, Ruth Selwyn looked at him.

“I am not afraid,” she said, almost solemnly. “We can wait, and I can work with you.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT LAST.

“The good, the better, and the last the best;
This is the order of the Master’s wine.
More than the yesterdays to-days are blest,
And life’s to-morrows may be more divine.”

—*Good Words.*

MUCH to Miss Winthrop’s annoyance, on that eventful Saturday, Mrs. Rolfe soon brought her word that she could not possibly reach the station in time for the train that afternoon.

“I hope I have art enough to assume a virtue, and appear patient,” she said, after hearing Mrs. Rolfe’s unwelcome tidings; “but really, Emma, I have more sympathy for a caged lioness to-day than I ever had before.” There was, however, no help for her; she was obliged to submit to the inevitable and remain at Solitude over Sunday.

Monday was the first day of the new year, but the gray clouds threatened a storm, and, fearing a deep snow, the whole party returned to the city that morning, and that very afternoon Miss Winthrop hurried to Hermitsville.

She found Mr. Millington's house without difficulty, and, as soon as she saw its owner, without prelude she made known her errand.

"Twenty-three years ago next June," she said, "a little child was left in your care. What and where is that child to-day?"

Mr. Millington surveyed her coolly. "So you've come for him at last, have you?" he said brusquely. "Well, it does appear to me, ma'am, that you've been a long time on the way."

"Man," Miss Winthrop cried, "you don't suppose I am that woman, do you? I have been trying to get on her trail through all these years, and now I want you to tell me everything you know about that child, and, if the facts are what I believe, we will soon put him where he belongs, and make hearts that have long been sorrowful sing for joy."

Very gladly, after he had told his story and heard Miss Winthrop's, Mr. Millington consented to accompany her to the city. His joy amounted almost to exultation, and he confided to his wife that he wished the day was the Fourth of July, and he himself a boy again, with a pocketful of fire-crackers, for it would be a great satisfaction to give vent to his feelings in an explosion.

That same Monday afternoon John, with a heart full of glad content, returned to his humble room. He felt very strong for work now; happiness had

quite put Francis Sharp out of his mind, and the positive good, within his grasp, seemed too great for him any longer to speculate upon possibilities, or sigh for the unattainable.

Grandfather Graves met him in the hall. With a pleasant word John passed him and entered his room, but a little to his surprise the old man followed him.

“I’m glad you’ve come back. I’ve something to tell you,” he said mysteriously. “He’s been here.”

“He, who?”

“Francis, Susie’s husband. He’s comin’ again soon. An’,” he added, as if telling an important secret, “I know that name now.”

“What name?”

“The name of the rich man where we all lived. It’s come back to me; seein’ Francis brought it back. It was Scott.”

“Scott!” John ejaculated, and even as he spoke a heavy step stumbled through the hall, and the next moment Francis Sharp stood in the open door.

“I’ve come,” he said. “I’ve found you agin at last, all along of him,” and he pointed to Grandfather Graves; “it pays to be kind to the poor—when you are rich, don’t you forget that.”

“What do you mean?” John asked.

“I’ll tell you,” Francis answered, “but it must

be in a few words, for time's precious. I'd have been here afore, but I've been sick an' in the hospital, an' while I was there I lost your card, an' I'd depended on that; an' so I'd forgot your street. An' then, when I got better, I says to myself, it's all to be done over; I've got to look him up agin, an' it really began to seem to me that life was nothing but a game of hide-and-go-seek. But first, 'fore I looked for you, I thought I'd come here and see him," and Francis nodded kindly at the old man, who nodded back with an expression of intense delight on his wrinkled face. "An' he had the wonderfulest stories to tell me of the lodger who was so good to him, an' when I asked his name, lo and behold, it was you. I might have spent weeks lookin' for you if it hadn't been for him, but now," and Francis came close to John and laid his hands on his shoulders, "now I've found you, and I've got the clue all straight, and now I want that picture I giv' you, an' the necklace you said you had."

John hesitated. Francis had asked for the most precious things he possessed. To give them up might be to resign forever his only hope and chance of finding his family; and what warrant had he for placing them in that strange man's hands?

While he was considering what to do, Francis watched him with eyes as sharp as his name.

"You needn't be 'afraid to trust me," he said slowly. "I want nothin' but justice. Maybe I could do it without 'em, but they'll make it easier: they'll tell. An' when I go to them I ought to give 'em some proof; you know, I can't ask 'em to believe me without no evidence. You'll trust me, won't you?" and he looked appealingly at John.

"Yes," John said firmly, "I will," and unlocking his trunk he took out a small box. Francis grasped it with hungry hands. "You won't never regret it," he said, "an' early to-morrow you'll see me agin," and without more words he hurried off.

Early the next morning Francis Sharp ascended the steps of Mr. Scott's house and rang the bell.

"Be the master an' the mistress in?" he asked of the servant who answered the bell, and without waiting for her reply he continued: "I want to see them; I've important bizness with them."

The servant carried his request to Mr. Scott, and in a few moments, by that gentleman's order, Francis was shown into the sunny room where he sat reading to Mrs. Scott.

With a slow, hesitating step, Francis came near and eyed Mr. and Mrs. Scott with an expression not only critical, but doubtful.

"Well, my man," Mr. Scott said kindly, "what can I do for you?"

Francis Sharp's doubtful expression changed to one of glad certainty.

"I know the voice," he exclaimed quickly. "It is all right. I've got the straight clue. Master," and he bowed low to Mr. Scott, "don't you remember me? I'm Francis Sharp."

"Francis Sharp," Mr. Scott echoed; "can it be possible!"

"Yes, it be possible," Francis said, as he dropped into a chair that stood near, and taking out his handkerchief wiped his face nervously; "it be possible, though many's the time it's seemed to me it never would be possible. I've followed you here, an' I've followed you there," he explained hurriedly, "an' sometimes it has seemed to me we was just playing at seesaw, for as often as I went up you was sure to be gone down, and *vice versa*."

"Why did you follow us, Francis?" Mr. Scott asked, with an anxious glance at his wife. "What do you want?"

"I want justice, nothin' but justice," Francis answered, with vehemence. "Ma'am"—and in a softened voice he turned to Mrs. Scott, who was watching him with a colorless face—"Ma'am, twenty-three years ago, come next June, a great trouble came to you, and came through mine and me. I vowed then, ma'am, that, if I lived, I would do justice yet, an' I've come this mornin'

jest to prepare you, afore I bring some one here you'll be gladder to see than me. But first—'cause I want all things to be certain an' sure—will you please look at this, ma'am, and jest say if you know it." And, opening the little box with an unsteady hand, Francis took out the necklace and dropped it in Mrs. Scott's lap.

He waited only to hear the one low cry, "O my baby!" and saying, "It's all right, ma'am; I'll be back soon," he rushed from the house, and in a moment, before any one thought to detain him, he was out of sight.

An hour or two later, as Mr. Millington and Miss Winthrop stood before the door of the house in which John lodged, a rough-looking man came up and joined them.

"Good-mornin', sir," he said to Mr. Millington, after a moment's sharp inspection; "ain't you the man that had the boy folks call John Millington?"

"Yes," Mr. Millington answered.

"I thought so. I've seen you afore in Hermitsville. I'm the woodcutter, Francis Sharp."

"Francis Sharp!" Miss Winthrop cried; "why, what are you here for?"

"I'm here to do justice," he said solemnly. "And," he said, as Miss Winthrop continued to look sternly at him, "you have the advantage of me, ma'am. I don't seem to know you"—with

something like an apology for his ignorance—"Maybe it's because the years ain't spared you no more'n they have me."

"The years have at least spared me my senses," Miss Winthrop said severely; "and now, Francis Sharp, I want to know what you mean. What justice are you going to do?"

"I've a story to tell," Francis said, as the door opened and he hurried into the house and up the stairs, "and I'd like Mr. Millington and yourself to hear it, ma'am; maybe you'll help to make it plainer," and, without even waiting to knock, he entered John's room.

John sat with his head resting on the table. That night of waiting and suspense had been long and wearing. At one time he had felt strongly tempted to go without delay to the Scotts, but then he had reflected that, after all, he knew nothing, and, whatever he hoped, could prove nothing. He had no right, he decided, to disturb their peace with any wild imaginations of his own brain. There was nothing for him to do save to wait. And so, in the strength that comes through prayer alone, he had waited; but it was a pale and almost haggard face that his friends saw now, as he raised his head and looked at them.

With just a word or two of greeting they came in and took their seats, and in a moment they were followed by Grandfather Graves.

"It will all come right now," the old man mumbled, in a satisfied tone, but no one heeded him.

Every eye was fastened on Francis, as, standing so close beside John that his hand rested on his shoulder, he said impressively :

"I've kept my word ; you didn't trust me for nothin' ; they're waiting for you," and he motioned, as if pointing to some one in the distance ; "but first, I've got a story that I must tell you ; it wont be long, an' then I'll do justice."

He waited a moment, but no one spoke or stirred, and he went gravely on.

"More'n twenty-three years ago there was a beautiful place, not a great ways from here, where a rich man lived. I was his coachman. I had a bright, pretty wife then, and grandfather here," and he pointed to the old man, "was her father, and lived there, too. We had a pleasant little home," and Francis drew his hand across his eyes, as if the memory of that little home was still very vivid and very dear, "and we were all very happy ; and at just about the same time two little babies came to that place. One was Susie's an' mine, an' the other was born in the great house. That baby grew an' thrived, but very soon Susie's began to pine, an' afore long we laid it away in a little grave. That was a dreadful blow," and Francis sighed deeply, "and after it fell upon her

Susie seemed changed, and grandfather an' me noticed that she was often very strange.

“ We said nothin' about it, though, an' we covered it all, 'cause we didn't think any harm would come from it; we thought it was just grief for her baby that made her so, an' after a time we hoped an' b'lieved she would be better. She was very fond of the baby at the great house. She was always trying to meet it when the nurse had it out in the grounds, an' she'd make errands up to the house a-purpose to see it; but that seemed natural, too; women is always so fond of babies.

“ Well, one summer day, just twenty-three years ago next June, the gentleman an' his wife went to the city. I drove 'em; an' grandfather here, was workin' in the grounds a good ways from the house, an' the other servants was all busy with their own affairs, an' didn't pay no attention to what Susie or any one else might be doing.

“ Well, some time in the course of that mornin', the nurse took sick, an' she sent for Susie to come an' take care of the baby, 'cause she knew Susie loved it, an' she thought it would be safe enough with her, for she didn't know nothin' at all about her strangeness. She was very sick, an' she didn't think nothin' about the baby for several hours, an' when, in the afternoon, me an' the gentleman an' his wife came back, Susie was gone and so was the baby.

“There was a terrible time then”—and Francis shuddered, as if the very recollection of that time was terrible. “It came out about Susie’s strangeness, an’ the gentleman blamed grandfather an’ me, ’cause we’d covered it up. And what with the trouble about the baby, an’ the worry about Susie—for Susie was very dear to me an’ grandfather, ma’am,” and Francis looked sadly at Miss Winthrop—“grandfather had a shock, an’ he’s never been the same man since.

“Well,” Francis went on, after a little pause, in which he had several times wiped his eyes and choked back sobs, “we searched everywhere for Susie, but it was always for Susie, always for a woman with a baby; they never seemed to think of lookin’ for the baby without the woman.”

Miss Winthrop nodded. “That was where we made a mistake,” she ejaculated; but no one noticed the interruption.

Once more Francis drew his hand across his eyes, and in a slow, sad voice, continued:

“We found Susie at last, after a good many weeks, an’ then she was ravin’ crazy. She didn’t seem to have any memory of the baby, an’ the police said she’d destroyed it; an’ after awhile the gentleman himself began to think so; but I never thought so.”

“I knew Susie loved that baby, an’ I knew she had a kind heart, an’ I b’lieved that when she

found she couldn't keep it, an' take care of it no longer, she'd be that cunning that she'd try to leave it somewhere where she'd think the folks would be kind to it. And so, 'cause I b'lieved that just as sure as I b'lieved the Bible, an' 'cause, too, I felt responsible-like for that baby, 'cause it was lost through Susie's strangeness, an' my coverin' of it up, I vowed that if I lived I'd do justice some day.

"I couldn't stay in my place; maybe it would have been better if I had; but I couldn't; an' I went off. I've had a hard time. It was years afore, in one of Susie's sensible moments, she give me a clue to Hermitsville, an' then, after I got the clue, I couldn't find the folks. They've been hard to catch as birds in the woods, but it's all come right at last; and now"—and he placed his hand on John's bowed head—"now, if you'll come with me, we'll go an' do justice."

Without a word John started up. No one felt inclined to speak, but Grandfather Graves, with trembling steps, came to the young man's side. "You tell 'em," he said solemnly, "you tell 'em, an old man says you've been very good to him, an' him that's good to the poor an' the old will be a good son, an' make his father an' his mother glad."

John gave the old man's hand a warm pressure; and then in utter silence followed Francis.

"Let me go first," Francis said, when at last they reached Mr. Scott's house. And in an another minute he was in the room where, in an agony of hope and fear, Mr. and Mrs. Scott were awaiting his return.

"I've done it, ma'am," he said gently, as he looked at Mrs. Scott. "Twenty-three years ago I vowed I'd do it. I've worked hard; I've been discouraged often; but I've never giv' up. And now I've brought him. I've done justice at last, and now I'm satisfied."

And with a long breath of relief, as if he were dropping a great weight, Francis stepped back and motioned to John.

"Go in," he said huskily.

With trembling steps John crossed the threshold, and, as he clasped his mother in his arms, from a full heart came the glad thanksgiving: "My mother, my own mother. Thank God! we know each other at last."

Hours after, when they had grown calmer, and John and his parents were alone, Mrs. Scott opened the little box that Francis had brought her, and with tender eyes looked at the old daguerrotype.

"How well I remember the day these pictures were taken," she said, in a happy voice. "Something your father said as we were looking at them touched me, and, sitting beside him, I wrote these

words," and she opened the slip of time-yellowed paper John had always preserved inside the case — "and then, to give them additional emphasis, I signed them with our motto. How strange, that after all these years, you should bring them back to me," and she smiled lovingly at her son.

"I do not understand yet how that picture came into your possession," Mr. Scott said to John.

"Francis gave it to me," John explained. "He told me a little while ago that he found it among Susie's things, after she went off. He supposes she must have taken it, in one of her strange spells, when she was up at the house, and he kept it because he thought that it might help him some time to find me. When he gave it to me, he says his hope was, that if he failed in his search for you, the resemblance between the faces and myself might, as I grew older, give me a clue."

"It might have done so," Mr. Scott said thoughtfully. "It seems strange now that it did not. I remember well how surprised I was when Will showed me your seal. But we were all blind; we took too much for granted."

"Whose are these initials?" John asked now, as he took up the necklace and examined the clasp.

"Your father's," Mrs. Scott answered. "I

meant that you should have his name, Frederick Gray Scott. But, I believe," she added tenderly, "that your kind friends chose a better one for you, for to me truly you are the gracious gift of God."

"You are right," Mr. Scott said gravely to his wife, "and we will not change John. But Millington"—and he turned to his son—"that must be dropped, I think, for you must remember that you are a Scott now."

"I am glad to be," John said, with manly pride, "but I think I must still retain Millington; under that name my defenceless childhood was sheltered, and I should feel ungrateful now to drop it. With your approval"—and he looked at his father—"I will always write my name, in full: John Millington Scott."

"I am satisfied," Mr. Scott said, with a wonderful light in his usually grave eyes. "Call yourself by what name you like, my boy, so long as you attach Scott to it. It is enough for us that we can call you son."

The shadows of the past, and the sunshine of the present, seemed to meet in the smile with which Mrs. Scott listened to her husband's words; but the sunshine conquered; and placing her hand on John's she said fondly:

"Yes, it is enough. Thank God, that after all these years of sadness, he has brought us 'Out

of the Shadow,' and satisfied us fully with his goodness."

"I must tell Ruth," John said, the next morning, to his mother.

"Go to her to-day," Mrs. Scott answered, divining with a mother's instinct his unspoken wish, "and tell her," she added tenderly, "that my happiness will not be quite complete, until my daughter comes to fill the place that is waiting for her in our home."

Great was the rejoicing at Professor Selwyn's when John appeared and told his glad story.

"And so," Ruth said playfully, when in the shadowy twilight she and John were alone, "and so it all ends like a story-book, and the king has come to his own at last."

"It would be much more to the purpose for me to inquire when the queen will come to her own," John answered gayly. "Mrs. Scott—you have not told me yet—I hope you are pleased with your future prospects."

"Yes, I am pleased," she frankly owned. And then, with a ring of true pleasure in her voice, she added, "But I am gladder still"—

"That gladness must be accounted for," John said, after waiting in vain for her to finish her sentence. "Ruthie, if anything can make you gladder than this, that I have told you to-day, I must know what it is."

“Must you?” she hesitated; and then, through sunny tears, with a shy and yet proud grace, she said, “I am glad you gave me a chance to prove that it was not your name or your wealth I cared for, but—yourself.”

He did not answer her in words at once, and when he spoke, his voice was almost solemn in its earnestness.

“Do you think I have not remembered that?” he asked. “On this glad day it has been one of my deepest causes for thanksgiving. Ruthie, my cup seems flowing over with blessings now, and the deepest longings of my soul are fully satisfied. But in the midst of all my joy for what I now possess, I can still thank God for the years in which those blessings were withheld. For all his wonderful leadings I thank him, but most I thank him for the discipline that taught me, that, with his help and blessing, I could work my own way through the world, and win for myself the independence, friendship and love, that makes my life so precious.”

Years of deep happiness and peace in his home, and of ever-increasing usefulness and honor in the world, were given to John Millington Scott. In him father and mother and wife and children confided, with a confidence no shadow of doubt ever chilled.

The friends who had aided him in his obscurity found him, in his noble manhood, an unfailing support. Under his protecting care Francis Sharp lived his last, which were also his best, days. Comforted by him, Grandfather Graves passed through the valley of shadows and entered the light beyond. In him, as old age approached, Mr. Crosby found one who delighted to bear his burdens and lighten his cares. In and out of his beautiful home, his adopted parents, and brothers and sisters, with their children, came and went with the glad freedom of those who knew that a warm welcome always awaited them, and that the best that home afforded was never counted too good for them.

Great wealth was his, but it was wealth of which he felt himself to be but the steward, and which he was always ready, like a faithful servant, to use freely for his Master's honor. His hand was always extended to raise the falling, support the weak and rescue the perishing. In his home, in the church, and in the State, men leaned on him and found him strong; and the secret of his strength can all be told in these few words:

He trusted in the Lord, and "the Lord was with him, and *that* which he did, the Lord made *it* to prosper."

THE END.

738.4

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022030255

